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DONATA WENDERS



**'It's no secret that Nelson's primary inspiration—on the guitar, at least—is the late Gypsy-jazz luminary Django Reinhardt'**

ADAM LEVY

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**Photographer**

Rowland Scherman

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Quality acoustic sounds to go.  
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Life before sound recordings. What was that like? Until 1878, no one had ever recorded the human voice. Ten years later, the first gramophones and musical recordings were commercially released. In 1921, the first radio station began to transmit. Mac Randall recounts one consequential part of this complex story by focusing on early acoustic music in this issue's "Guitar on Record" feature, starting with the 1917 release of the first-ever jazz release, "Livery Stable Blues."

What Johannes Gutenberg was to prophets, writers, and poets, gramophone inventor Emile Berliner was to composers and performers. Just as Homer, Plato, and Aristotle were not much more than mythic names prior to the invention of printing (and virtually no one had actually read the Bible), the advent of recording made common knowledge the music of Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, and thousands of others.

But while the global spread of printing also started a centuries-long decline in oral storytelling traditions, audio recording had the opposite effect, elevating performers and interpreters of traditional music to the same heights as composers who notated their music on paper.

One result was a mad scrambling of musical cultures, as diverse traditions collided in a virtual reality of the airwaves, resulting in what was once called "crossover music," though that label has by now long outlived its meaning. Go to the Playlist department in this issue, and practically every sentence you read recounts the mashups, remixes, and retellings wrought by modern performers.

Another consequence of recording was the compression and freezing of time, whereby a regional artist of the 1920s like John Hurt

could abandon music altogether, only to become a Rip van Winkle-esque pop culture hero 40 years later when his early recordings surfaced at the height of the folk boom. Steve James recounts this marvelous tale in this issue's "Gaslight Memories," with a big assist from John Sebastian and Happy Traum.

Recording did something else of tremendous consequence for musicians by turning their work into a vast commercial enterprise. From a purely economic perspective, the early days of recording were the era of exploitation, as many musicians exchanged

their intellectual property for cash with little regard for the long-term benefits they were foregoing. That era quickly passed, however, and the second phase looked a bit like payback, as recording stars demanded and received treatment once reserved for titans of industry. Now we've entered the third era, as digitization kills both the record company and the rock star. Once again, musicians are the primary owners, protectors, and disseminators of their

music. Recording is very much still with us, but not the recording industry.

The fourth phase will look nothing like the first three, but rest assured our lives will still be filled with music. In that spirit, please enjoy this issue to the fullest. Along with the stories I've just mentioned, you'll find Adam Levy's breakdown of Willie Nelson's nylon-string stylings, Adam Perlmutter's transcription of a newly recorded Bill Frisell tune, a visit with Matt Eich of Mule Resophonic Guitars, and a whole lot more. Let me know how it works for you!

—David A. Lusteran, Editor  
David.Lusteran@Stringletter.com



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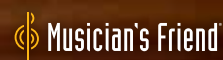


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### COWBOY GUITARS, MAINE-STYLE

I really enjoyed the Cowboy Guitars article in the March issue. They are great; I have a cardboard Roy Rogers in my collection, and I have always loved the Golden West. However, here on the coast of Maine, we wear “Souwester” rain hats instead of ten gallon hats, and catch lobsters instead of roping steers. We can’t ride the range, so we ride the seas instead. Inspired by Roy, I had a local artist paint my old Madeira several years ago. I thought you might like to see this “Coastal and Eastern” version!

—Frank Gatchell, Harpswell, ME

### SCOTTISH SPARK

Just got the May issue and loved the “Hail Caledonia” article. I want to bring to your attention a fantastic Scottish singer, guitar player, and entertainer by the name of Alex Beaton. Before suffering a stroke and becoming paralyzed on July 2, 2011, Alex was the music director for the Grandfather Mountain Highland Games (the stage there is named after him), and was very active at the Stone Mountain Games and numerous Scottish games festivals throughout the US.

Originally from Scotland, Alex became a US citizen and served in the Air Force, where he entertained our troops. His CD, *Live in Concert—Alex Beaton, Alasdair Fraser & Eric Rigler*, recorded many years ago at the Orange County Fairgrounds in Costa Mesa, California, will give you an insight to his talent. I just want him to know he is not forgotten.

—Hal Chapman, via email



### READERS WRITE

I subscribe to quite a few mags to support my interests: sailing, fishing, writing, science, and now acoustic guitar. Magazines tend to make a lot of promises on the cover that the articles inside don’t fulfill. But AG always measures up. I’ve learned more about guitars and guitar music in the last few months than I ever knew before. AG has so much information between the digital/print versions and the AG newsletter that I can’t keep up. It generates a little sense of frustra-

tion, but it also lights a fire under me to keep learning. Very few publications manage to do that. AG is one of the best reading decisions I’ve ever made.

—Dennis Wild, Highland, NY

I really enjoy the diversity of articles and the balanced mix of content in AG. These provide a great opportunity to broaden horizons to different genres. In particular, the recent series of articles on the music of the original blues players provides a great education into the variety of early acoustic blues styles. I read every issue from cover to cover and look forward to the next one landing in the mail box.

—Colin Alesbury, via email

### SHOP TALK

For years I shopped online for any piece of equipment I needed, even guitar strings. Then, one day, I started thinking about my favorite local store here in San Diego that I’ve been going to regularly since 1982. These guys hooked me up with my first good electric guitar, I purchased my first PA system through them, and I have had repairs done on all of my acoustics by them. The same crew is in the shop now as was in there in 1982—with the addition of a few new and younger faces, of course. The shop is called Moze Guitars, and it is simply the best, small-market shop in America’s eighth largest city. Nobody beats these guys for friendliness and knowledge—and those are the qualities that internet music sites can never compete with or replace.

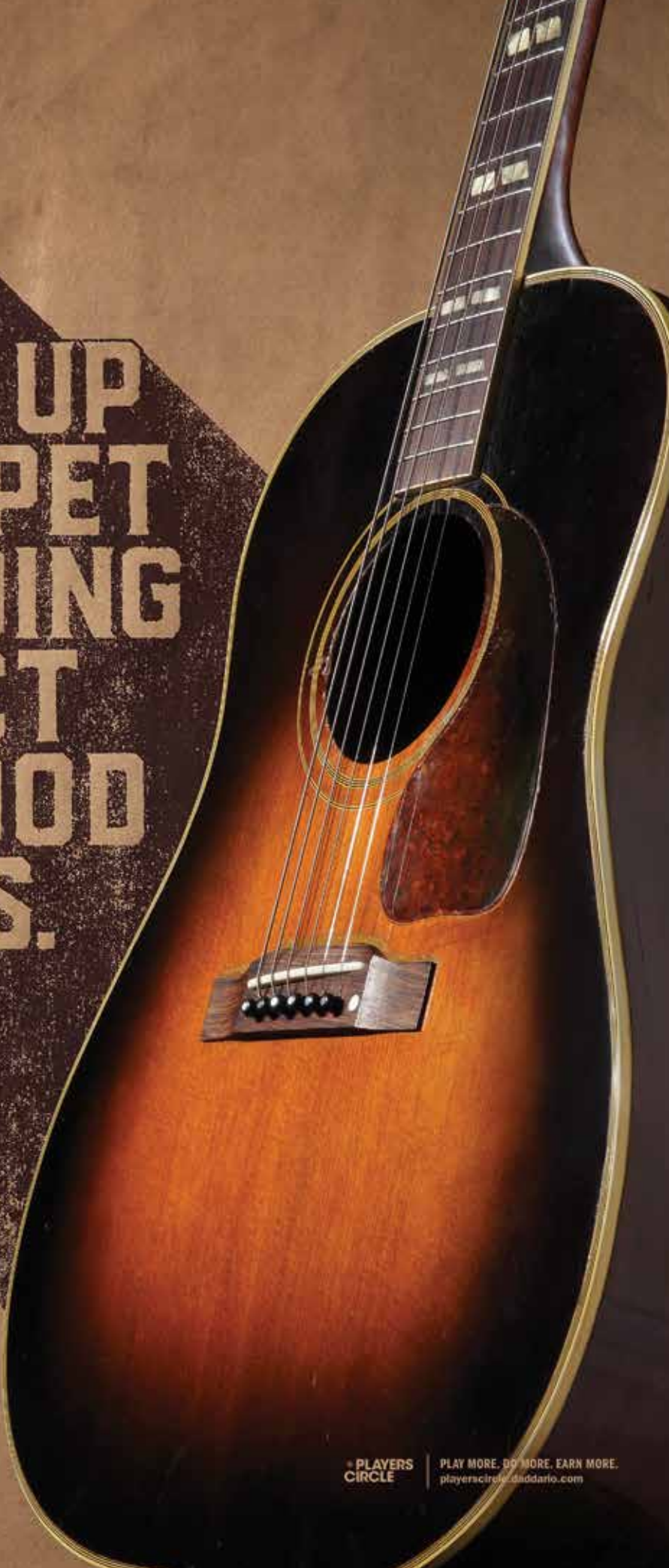
—Jim Earp, San Diego, CA







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## Asian Dreams, American 12-String

The exotic instrumental flights of Steve Tibbetts

BY BLAIR JACKSON

Steve Tibbetts' music is impossible to pigeonhole. The guitarist has had a long, fruitful relationship with ECM Records, which leans toward jazz, avant-garde, and modern classical, but he doesn't fit neatly into any of those categories. His finest albums have been centered on his Martin D12-20 12-string but are light years away from chime-y coffeehouse folk music you might associate with that instrument. There's definitely a strong Asian thread, with echoes of Bali, India, and Nepal, so I suppose it could be called "world music," but that doesn't quite capture it either. No, Tibbetts is in his own category of atmospheric instrumental music.

His latest ECM effort, *Life Of*—his first album in eight years—is certainly one of his best. Over the course of 13 musical vignettes, Tibbetts takes his 12-string on a remarkable, at times meditative, journey to some wonderfully evocative

dream spaces. That Martin—a gift from his father (who was a player himself, but more in the folk mold) four decades ago—lays the foundation with slow, graceful lines, occasional quick and exciting flurries, cascading waterfalls of 12-string beauty, and bent notes and vibrato galore. But under and around that guitar, Tibbetts layers sparse, gamelan-like piano that drifts and sings; his longtime percussionist Marc Anderson adds expressive and tasteful dollops to the soundscape; cellist Michelle Kinney provides subtle, sonorous drones; and then there are fleeting and floating sonic touches from Tibbetts' personal sample library of Asian percussion and other sounds, triggered via a Roland GK-2 or MOTU MachFive sampler.

I caught up with Tibbetts by phone at his studio in St. Paul, Minnesota, and asked him about his work process and, of course, his Martin 12-string.

**Was there something coherent about this group of pieces that spoke to you as a unit? Even though your albums are sometimes years apart, I presume you're working on things all the time.**

I am. I'm always working on a lot of things. Here's what I could work on: I have electric guitar sample libraries, percussion sample libraries; I have an electric guitar piece that's been languishing; I have this album I've been spending a lot of time on. Even if I'm regularly devoting an hour here to one thing and an hour there to another thing, at a certain point you have to say, "I have to stop doing all this and finish something." So, what are you going to spend your time doing? In the old days, when I didn't have kids, I could come to the studio and easily spend 12 to 14 hours here, but I didn't want to do that anymore. It made much more sense for me to manage the kids and the house



and the driving, to pare back, make some music that was stripped down—it's guitar, piano, and a couple of friends—and not think expansively of huge crystalline cathedrals of . . . sonic *overwhelmingness*. Right? It's fine to settle into something simple. But, yes, these pieces came together and eventually made sense as a group.

Right now, my hands are in good shape. At present, I don't have any problems, but time marches on. It can't go on forever. If I'm going to do the kind of playing I do, I should record it now while I still can. The 12-string is really hard on the hands.

**You really dig into it. Have you had to have much work done on your 12-string through the years?**

We live and die by our luthiers, and there's a really good one in town here named Ron Tracy [St. Paul Guitar Repair, [stpaulguitarrepair.com](http://stpaulguitarrepair.com)]. He does guitar work for Dean Magraw and [Pat] Donohue and Leo [Kottke]—he's a superstar to the working guitarists in town.

Some years ago, I brought in my 12-string and it had really gone to hell. I had worn the frets down. Too much vibrato for too many years and too much hammering-on. I brought it in and Ron said, "At this point, we've really got to do a complete neck job." He had to re-plane and re-fret the neck. He said, "Are you the original owner?" "Well sort of; it was my dad's guitar." Ron said, "We might be able to get warranty work on this." I thought, "That won't be possible." But he called up Martin, and then he asked me, "Do you have any paper on it?" I said, "No, all I have is a church bulletin that shows my dad receiving it as a gift—he was given the 12-string for his years of service as the youth group leader." Martin said, "That's good, that'll do." So it ended up under the rubric of warranty work! That guitar's going to outlast me.

Right after the war [World War II], my dad came back and worked as a young union organizer, and one of his first gigs working for TWUA [Textile Workers Union of America] was to go to a little shop in Nazareth, Pennsylvania. He lasted one day before they figured out he was trying to unionize the line, and they fired him. I made sure Martin had already done the paperwork for the neck before I had Ron pass that story on.

**Instead of stringing the four lower courses with octave courses, you use unison pairs. Where did that come from?**

I think it was from the old dropped D. You get a drone, and then you don't have to think

about it—it gives you a deeper and more resonant sound, and then from there the D went down to C, and the A went down to G, and then everything went down a whole step on the 12-string. I just left it there.

**Tell me about your preference for so-called dead strings over new strings.**

I don't like the sound of brand-new strings. They're so brassy and shriek-y in a way. There's a middle ground between completely dead and crusted with flesh and brand new. From my standpoint, it's also practical. I can come back to a piece in a year, and if I've got the same guitar and strings in more-or-less the same shape, I can go in and fix something and the sound will match. Also,



when the strings are at a point somewhere between brassy newness and utter un-intonation they sound really nice with a piano; they sort of lay in there. Over the years, I've found there are certain strings that sound good for a longer time. The John Pearse strings are good.

**Did you ever have a period where you played a lot of six-string acoustic?**

Sure, I had an Ovation—a deep-bowl Balladeer, because I saw one on the cover of [John McLaughlin's] *My Goals Beyond*.

**I'm curious about how the pieces on the new album were constructed. Did you record the guitar line first and then fit the piano around that, or did you go with the piano first sometimes?**

It's almost always guitar and piano bits first. There was one piece that started with some loops that were easy to play over.

**Do you think about leaving space for piano in relation to the guitar?**

It cross-pollinates. Sometimes there are places the piano goes in and it makes it really clear that there's way too much guitar—too much playing, too much noodling around—so the guitar has to go. I wipe the guitar and play just listening to the piano. Then, maybe some of the piano doesn't make sense anymore.

It's really hard to produce yourself. Sometimes you need some distance. I'll leave a piece for a while and then come back to it and I might say, "What was I thinking?"

**Are most of those samples you use—very judiciously, I might add—things you recorded yourself during your travels in Asia?**

Yes, but they're not exclusively from Asia. When I was working in Bali for a study-abroad program, there was a guy who asked the class if we wanted to come down and see him do a pour [casting] at a gong shop. That didn't work out, but I asked him if I could come down and record his gongs, so I spent a day with a Denon DAT [recorder] and a stereo mic recording his gongs, and I've been mining those sample for years. I have samples of longhorns I recorded in Sikkim in a Tibetan monastery. I've got samples from all over the world.

But there's a set of samples I cooked up by using my wife's dinnerware—this set of crystal goblets—and I made a sort of glass harmonica out of that. It's a good recording—I can pitch it down, and it sounds unearthly. I've also sampled the guitar itself, and I have something called a mini harp [I've sampled] too.

**The samples are so nicely employed. Things appear and then vanish, as if they've evaporated.**

Sometimes it's very tempting to be demonstrative with that. But I think it's better to err on the side of haziness.

**So there's a lot of subtraction involved?**

Not with the drones, but with the piano and the guitar.

**How do you know when you're done?**

It's hard. It's not a situation where you wave a checkered flag and say, "It's done!" With me, it's like triage. I'm just thinking, "I can't do anything more with this patient." **AC**



PHOTOS BY NICK MILLEVOI

# Museum Pieces

**Martin celebrates its flagship D-28 with a new exhibit**

BY NICK MILLEVOI

Visiting the Martin Guitar Museum in Nazareth, Pennsylvania, is an immersive experience. Located inside the same building as the Martin factory, the museum tells the history of the company through an extensive collection of prized instruments. Starting with the first guitars that Christian Frederick Martin ever built, in the 1830s, the collection works its way up to the company's modern era by including what seems like every variation of a Martin guitar, from standard production models to one-offs and proto-

types and instruments used by artists from Hank Williams to Kurt Cobain.

As visitors cycle back to the beginning of the museum, the final display is a temporary exhibit that changes annually. The current presentation, "The Evolution of the D-28," which opened in March, tells the story of this iconic guitar, favored by musicians such as Clarence White, Neil Young, and Michael Hedges. On display are 13 instruments, from the earliest examples to the most recent incarnation. Martin archivist Jason Ahner says, "Last year we reimagined the

D-28, so we thought it was important to tell its story from where Style-28 guitars began, to where the model itself comes in, up until now, to show the changes that took place throughout the history of that style of instrument."

Standing in front of the display cases and taking it all in, it's easy to witness the dynamic nature of the D-28's history and that of its predecessors. The exhibit begins with a pair of 0-28s, built in 1880 and 1912, respectively, and a 1914 000-28. These early models exemplify the basics of the Style-28 specs—rosewood back and sides, spruce top, herringbone trim, and a 5-9-5-pattern soundhole rosette.

Martin first built the dreadnought body style for the Oliver Ditson Company, from 1916 until 1930. These guitars featured extra large, elongated bodies, meant to produce a





louder sound with more bass response. In 1931, Martin brought the dreadnought under its own label, selling four model D-2s to the Chicago Musical Instrument Co. that year. On display at the exhibit was the first D-28, essentially identical to the D-2, featuring a slotted headstock, 12th-fret neck junction, and sloped shoulders. It's exciting to see this remarkably well-preserved 1931 example, having just a few finish cracks and wearing a hangtag with its original price, \$100.

The story of the D-28 continues as the instruments display changes that may seem subtle from model to model, but these gradients make for dramatic results from one end of the timeline to the other. Noticeable variables—such as the introduction of the 14-fret neck and the change to more square shoulders, both

exemplified on a pristine 1937 model (also \$100)—sit alongside less obvious updates, such as the bracing variations and slimmer nut found on a lightly worn 1941 example (\$125).

At the center of the exhibit is a well-checked 1966 model (\$375) that Chris Martin, the company's CEO, refers to as an example of his grandfather's and father's D-28. Shortly after this guitar was built, the D-28 went through a round of changes, including the introduction of a black pickguard and a change in binding material, from ivoroid to white Boltaron. The last two guitars in the exhibit—both made in 2017—show how Martin's update of the Standard series has recently transformed the D-28 model. The new Reimagined Standard D-28 (see a review in *AG*'s April 2018 issue) features aging toner on the

top, open-gear tuners, a faux tortoiseshell pickguard, and antique white binding, all of which evoke a more vintage feel and make the new D-28 stand in contrast to its more brightly appointed Standard Series sibling.

In creating "The Evolution of the D-28," Martin has done a fine job not only of conveying the instrument's development, but of placing it in a historical and cultural context. The exhibit features a parallel timeline of events, like the Dust Bowl and World War II, as well as ephemera such as a 1967 copy of *TV Guide* with *Star Trek* on the cover, a poster for the 1990 movie *Home Alone*, and even a publicity photo of the rapper Vanilla Ice. Ahner says, "We wanted to show how the country and the world were evolving along with the instruments that Martin was building." **AC**

# TRIGGER FINGERS

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**Willie Nelson channels Django  
Reinhardt's Gypsy spirit**

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**BY  
ADAM LEVY**



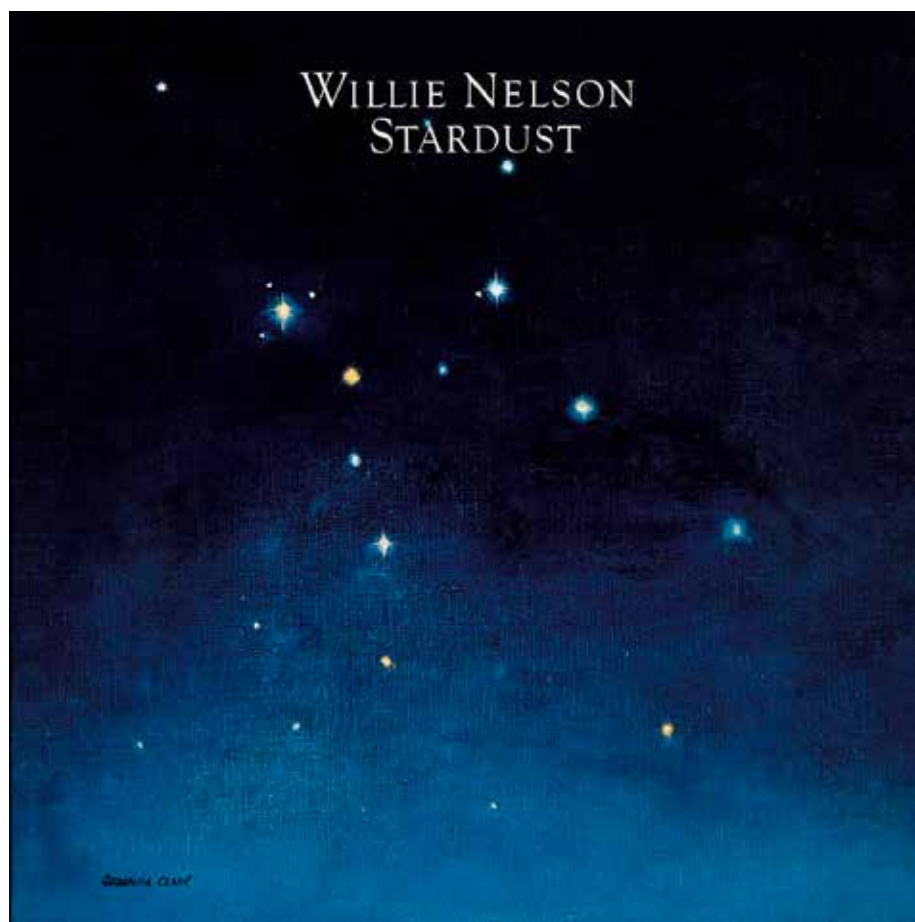
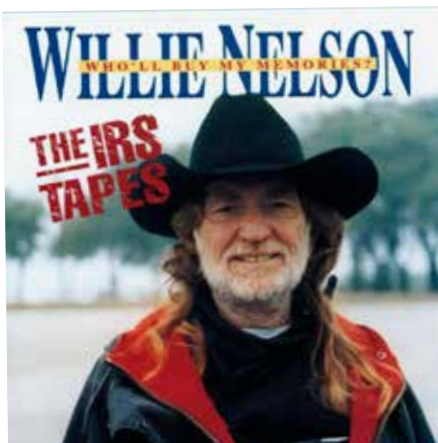


**L**egend has it that singer/songwriter Willie Nelson loves his tour bus so much that he prefers to sleep aboard it—parked outside his home—even when he’s not touring. True or not, the story is believable. After many thousands of nights on the road, a bunk is bound to feel more comforting than any bed. Nelson has been touring relentlessly as long as anyone can remember. Unlike most artists, who’ll hit the road primarily to promote a new release, Nelson just keeps on keeping on, whether or not he has a new album to plug.

At any given moment, however, odds are good that Nelson does have a new record out. Since beginning his recording career in the early 1960s, he has released more than 70 studio albums, two dozen collaborative albums, several live recordings, and countless compilations. His latest studio effort, *Last Man Standing*, was released on April 27, 2018—two days before his 85th birthday.

Many of Nelson’s original songs are now classics of the country canon—including “Crazy,” “Bloody Mary Morning,” “On the Road Again,” “Funny How Time Slips Away,” “Night Life,” and “Three Days.” Despite his popularity as an artist, he was a behind-the-scenes songwriter first. Consequently, the best-known versions of many Nelson songs are by other recording artists. “Crazy” is most often associated with vocalist Patsy Cline. “Night Life” was a hit for Ray Price, and many blues fans are familiar with B.B. King’s version. “Three Days” was a 1962 hit for Faron Young and did well for k.d. lang in 1990.

Nelson is almost never seen or heard without his well-worn nylon-string guitar, Trigger (named after film cowboy Roy Rogers’ horse), in hand. He acquired this Martin N-20 in 1969. He’d previously been playing a Baldwin nylon-string model, equipped with that company’s proprietary Prismatone pickup, played through a solid-state Baldwin C1



amplifier. That guitar got busted up by a drunken patron’s misstep while Nelson was gigging on the outskirts of San Antonio, Texas. When Nelson sent the Baldwin guitar back home to Nashville to be revived, the repairman told him it was beyond hope, and mentioned that he had a new Martin for sale. Since Nelson had liked the Baldwin’s amplified tone, he asked the repairman to pull the pickup from his totaled guitar and install it in the Martin, and Trigger was born. Nelson has been playing Trigger ever since, and the guitar and amp setup is as much a part of his musical persona as his voice is.

#### A JAZZ INSPIRATION

Though Nelson is most easily described as a country musician, elements of jazz have always permeated his style. This may be most apparent on his 1978 album *Stardust*, on which he croons his way through well-loved jazz standards, such as “Georgia on My Mind” and the album’s title track. But even on other albums, when he’s playing one of his own three- or four-chord songs, Nelson always takes melodic and harmonic chances. Country may be his milieu but jazz is his M.O.

It’s no secret that Nelson’s primary inspiration—on the guitar, at least—is the late Gypsy-jazz luminary Django Reinhardt. Echoes of Reinhardt’s sinuous melody lines can frequently be heard in Nelson’s guitar solos, as you’ll see later in this lesson. The first two examples here highlight Nelson’s notable rhythm-guitar style, which exhibits some Gypsy-jazz sophistication as well.

**Example 1** is based on Nelson’s recording of “I’m Falling in Love Again” from his 1992 album *The IRS Tapes: Who’ll Buy My Memories?* (Long story short: Nelson owed back taxes. To satisfy his debt, he negotiated a deal to record and release this music, and give the proceeds to the taxman.) The lush passing chords in measures 1 and 2 aren’t typical country fare but are Nelsonic indeed. D<sup>b</sup>9/A<sup>b</sup> serves as a chromatic approach to C9/G. G<sup>b</sup>6 functions similarly, approaching the F chord—though without the parallel voicing motion. Interestingly, the remainder of this passage is purely triadic. Nelson has never seemed to mind mixing jazz flavors with campfire sensibilities.

If you want to dig deep into Nelson’s guitar style, *The IRS Tapes* is a great place to start because it was recorded without any





### Example 1

Freely

Chords: C/G, D<sup>b</sup>9/A<sup>b</sup>, C<sup>9</sup>/G, G<sup>b</sup>6, F, C, G, C, F, C, G

### Example 2

Tempo: ♩ = 86

Chords: D, G, 1. D, A<sup>9</sup>/C<sup>#</sup>, 2. D

*let ring throughout*

Chords: A<sup>7</sup>, D, E<sup>b</sup>9/B<sup>b</sup>, D<sup>9</sup>/A, A<sup>b</sup>7, G, E

### Example 3a

Tempo: ♩ = 68

Chords: A, E<sup>m</sup>7, A<sup>7</sup>, D, G<sup>7</sup>, D, A<sup>aug</sup>7

additional production or orchestration. It's just his voice and guitar throughout, presumably tracked live in the studio.

### COLORING OUTSIDE THE LINES

*VH1 Storytellers: Johnny Cash & Willie Nelson* is another great opportunity to hear Nelson's guitar in the foreground. Recorded at a live concert appearance in 1997 (and released a year later), the album features just these two, singing some of their best-loved songs. They both play guitar, and take alternate turns on lead vocal. **Example 2** is composite—inspired by Nelson's freewheeling fills and Cash's rock-steady rhythm on their version of “Funny How Time Slips Away” from *VH1 Storytellers*.

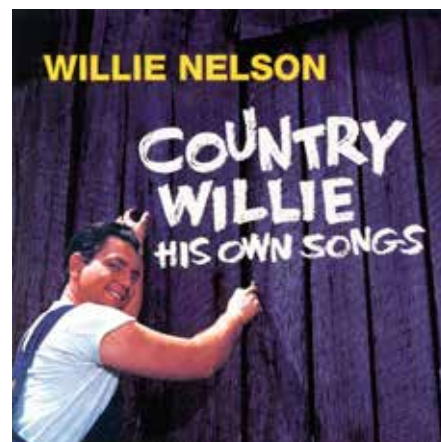
The first three measures are straightforward—à la Cash—except for the A $\flat$  on beat 4 of measure 1. That's pure Nelson. (Going to a G chord? Why not get there by half step?) Measure 4 incorporates a rootless A9 arpeggio, starting on the chord's third (C#). Played smoothly—as Nelson would—the maneuver sounds much more complex than it is.

**Example 3a** is in the style of Nelson's intro to “Are You Sure,” from his mid-'60s album *Country Willie—His Own Songs*.

Trigger wasn't in his hands just yet but he'd already been developing a singular voice on the guitar. This example illustrates Nelson's uncanny ability to keep the fundamentals covered while coloring outside the lines. You can see how the new chords are outlined fairly clearly at the beginning of each measure, yet there's some sly chromaticism to be found in between.

In **Example 3b**—also styled after “Are You Sure”—the fills get bluer and richer, harmonically speaking. Check out the two-note shapes in measure 2 and three-note shapes in measure 5. As before, these aren't difficult grabs, but they can sound incredibly cool when you play them with confidence. The rest of the fills here are common blues vocabulary, paced to complement Nelson's vocal delivery. Make sure to listen to the original recording.

“Darkness on the Face of the Earth” is another song from *Country Willie* that showcases Nelson's guitar skills. **Example 4** is in the style of the song's introduction. Guitarists don't always think of the key of F major as one that can feature hammer-ons from open strings. This example illustrates that there are plenty of melodic possibilities.



### CHROMATIC ANTICS

Nelson had previously recorded “Darkness on the Face of the Earth” on his 1962 debut album, *And Then I Wrote*, and he revisited it once again on his 1998 album *Teatro*. His guitar work on this later recording is completely different, though no less inventive. The next two examples are inspired by Nelson's thrilling mid-song solo. **Example 5a** begins simply and spaciously, which serves to heighten the drama that follows. In measure 3, an eighth-note line climbs up the E major scale from its sixth degree (C#).

This line changes direction at the end of the measure, morphing into a melodic pattern that continues downward through the first two beats of measure 4. Beats 3 and 4 here are a tumbling blur with chromatic passing tones. A few fingerings may work for this passage, but try this one first: Play the triplet with fingers 3-2-1, then quickly shift down one fret so that your second finger is on F#; finger the 16ths 2-3-2-1, then quickly shift down one more fret so that your first finger is on E for the downbeat of the following measure.

### Country may be his milieu but jazz is his M.O.

**Example 5b** is more laid back than Ex. 5a, though tension begins to build in measure 3 as the paired notes descend chromatically. The descending flurry on beat 3 of the fourth measure looks thorny on paper but it's really not. Play the first four notes of the quintuplet with your first finger. Slide from fret 5 to fret 2, then pull off to the open B. Note that on beat 4 of that same bar, the note C# anticipates the A chord in the final measure. (C# is the third of an A major triad.)

This next example is in the spirit of Nelson's solo on “Angel Flying Too Close to the Ground,” a tear-jerking ballad from the soundtrack of the







### Example 3b

Example 3b is a guitar exercise in D major, 4/4 time. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The exercise is divided into two systems, each with a treble and bass staff. Chord symbols are placed above the staff: D9, Eb9, D9, Ab7, G, E7 in the first system, and A7, D in the second system. The first system consists of four measures. The second system consists of four measures. The exercise features various fret numbers and fingerings, including triplets and slurs.

### Example 4

Example 4 is a guitar exercise in F major, 4/4 time. The key signature has one flat (Bb). The exercise is divided into two systems, each with a treble and bass staff. Chord symbols are placed above the staff: F, C7, F. The first system consists of four measures. The second system consists of four measures. The exercise features various fret numbers and fingerings, including slurs and ties.

### Example 5a

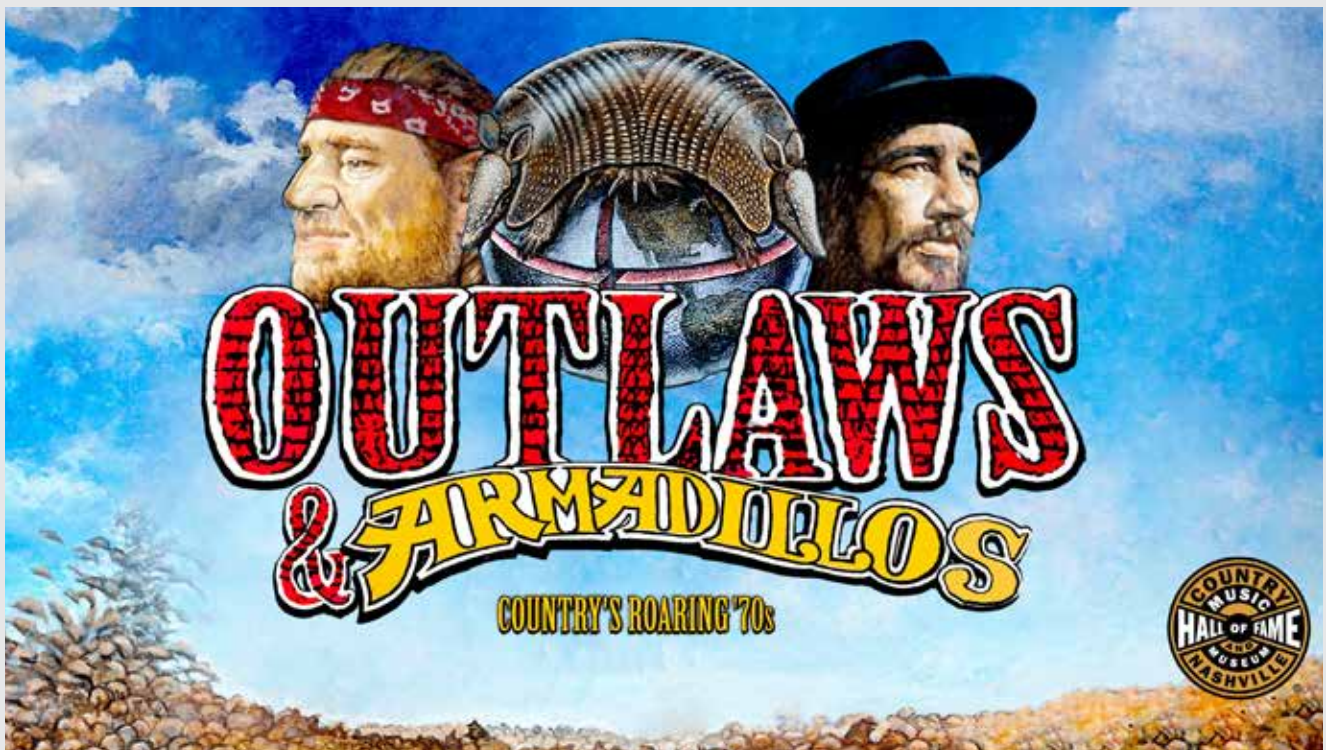
Example 5a is a guitar exercise in E major, 4/4 time. The key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The exercise is divided into two systems, each with a treble and bass staff. Chord symbols are placed above the staff: E, A, E. The first system consists of four measures. The second system consists of four measures. The exercise features various fret numbers and fingerings, including slurs and ties.

1981 film *Honeysuckle Rose*, which Nelson also acted in. The song's tempo is slow. Trigger—like most nylon-string guitars—isn't big on sustain. One way Nelson kept his original solo afloat was by re-attacking the notes, very much like you'll see in **Example 6**. Nelson's other effective tactic was the use of chromatic slurs like those in measures 6 and 8. These moves aren't a far cry from the slurs in Ex. 5b. The difference this time is that the slurs are single notes—not double-stops—and are in the guitar's lowermost register.

Nelson's beautiful "Moonlight in Vermont"—from his '78 album *Stardust*—is the inspiration for **Example 7**. Play it fingerstyle to best capture the gentle murmur of Nelson's original recording. The chord shapes in measure 1 will likely be familiar to you, though the shapes in measure 2 may not if you haven't played much jazz. Note that this Fmaj7 voicing has no third (A) in it but sounds complete nonetheless—perhaps because the note A is played in the previous measure and seems to linger. Gaug7 is a G7 chord with a raised fifth degree (D#). The Bb7 chord in

measure 4 is a familiar first-fret barre chord, though its sound is surprising in this key, as the song's composer, Hoagy Carmichael, intended. Remember—this example is merely the song's brief introduction. If the final G chord feels unresolved to you, play a C chord afterward.

*Adam Levy is an itinerant guitarist based in Los Angeles. His work has appeared on recordings by Norah Jones, Lisa Loeb, Amos Lee, and Ani DiFranco, among others. He is also the founder of Guitar Tips Pro. [guitartipspro.com](http://guitartipspro.com)*



**WILLIE NELSON** is one of the featured artists in *Outlaws & Armadillos: Country's Roaring '70s*—a special exhibit that opened in May 2018 at the Country Music Hall of Fame in Nashville. Though the term "outlaw" has been cheapened by overuse in modern music marketing, it was used throughout the 1970s to describe a thriving musical counterculture. Along with Waylon Jennings, Guy Clark, Kris Kristofferson, Bobby Bare, and Jessi Colter, Nelson was one of the pioneers of this movement. While the Nashville studios continued to churn out glossy country hits that clung to the cultural values and aesthetics of the 1950s, these artists

sought to express themselves in more personal and progressive ways.

It wasn't just the Nashville sound that Nelson and others were bucking. It was the system. RCA-Nashville had a contract with the local studio engineer's union. Any artist signed to the RCA label at the time—as a great many were—was bound to record at RCA studios if they were making a record in or around Nashville. Nelson violated this agreement when—as a producer—he recorded Waylon Jennings at an alternate studio in town, Glaser Sound Studios, also known as "Hillbilly Central."

After a fire leveled Nelson's Nashville-area home in 1971, he relocated to Austin, Texas—a city populated with

likeminded artists and simpatico music fans. Nelson enjoyed it so much there that he went on to convince many of his Nashville cronies to follow. A couple years later, he launched the Fourth of July Picnic festival, which still goes on. Though the festival has sometimes been held in other cities, its Austin roots have helped cement the city's reputation as the hub of non-mainstream Country.

The *Outlaws & Armadillos* exhibit puts the complex Nashville/Austin relationship into fresh perspective—looking back at the artists who shook things up in the '70s, as well as at modern Americana and alt-country iconoclasts, such as Sturgill Simpson, Chris Stapleton, and Margo Price.

—AL











**J**ust over 100 years ago, on March 26, 1917, the Original Dixieland Jass Band's "Livery Stable Blues," backed with "Dixieland Jass Band One-Step," was released. It's generally regarded as the first jazz record, although its primacy has long been debated by scholars. What's much less disputed is that "Livery Stable Blues" soon sold more than a million copies, eclipsing the sales of the era's previous commercial giants, Italian tenor Enrico Caruso and bandleader John Philip Sousa. (Keep in mind that the population of the United States was approximately 103 million in 1917, less than a third of what it is today, so selling a million of anything was pretty significant.) It was an early sign that the still-new medium of records would give a major boost to popular, non-classical styles of music. In so doing, that medium would shine a brighter spotlight on the instruments associated with those styles—such as the guitar.

The sound of a guitar had already graced many recordings by this time; you can hear guitarist M. Lloyd Wolfe duetting with mandolin virtuoso Samuel Siegel on a 1905 Edison cylinder, to name just one earlier example. One recording you wouldn't hear guitar on was the aforementioned "Livery Stable Blues," as the Original Dixieland Jass Band didn't have a guitar player. Even so, the huge commercial success of their recorded debut, followed in short order by that of other jazz, blues, folk, and country records and coupled with continuing advances in recording technology, would open up multiple new dimensions for the music business, in which guitars and guitarists would play a central role. The major industry changes triggered by that success also prompted philosophical questions—about commercialism, authenticity, and the transmission of culture—that are still being argued about a century later.

## THE GRAMOPHONE BLUES

All early audio recordings were made acoustically, without electricity. When, for instance, the Original Dixieland Jass Band recorded "Livery Stable Blues" at the New York studio of the Victor Talking Machine Company (which also issued the record), their playing was captured by a funnel-like metal protuberance called a sound horn. Inside the smaller end of the horn was a thin glass diaphragm, which vibrated in response to the sound waves produced by the band. A needle attached to the diaphragm then cut the vibrational patterns directly onto a blank rotating disc. This was the essence of the "gramophone" system devised in the 1890s by Emile Berliner, with help from his business associate Eldridge Johnson. Victor used shellac as the principal material for its discs, which were cut to play back on a turntable running at 78 revolutions per minute.

Neither shellac nor the 78-rpm speed were industry standards in 1917; there were no industry standards. But as the sales potential of records like "Livery Stable Blues" became apparent, mass adoption of these and other features quickly took hold. Companies that made it their business to produce and sell popular music records appeared just as quickly. A few names familiar to modern readers, such as Columbia and Decca, got into the game early, but there were many others: Besttone, Crystalate, Homochord, Melotto, Pickofall. And every one of them was interested in the hottest pop craze of the 1910s, the blues—or at least songs with the word blues in the title.

The first record fitting this description, "The Memphis Blues" (written by W.C. Handy), had been released on the Victor label in 1914, as played by a military band. Three years later

## The early history of recorded sound and acoustic instruments

BY MAC RANDALL

Blind Willie McTell records in an Atlanta hotel room, November 1940.



One of the earliest photos of a recording session shows Frank Ferera playing steel guitar with his guitarist Anthony Franchini and the vocal group, the Crescent Trio.

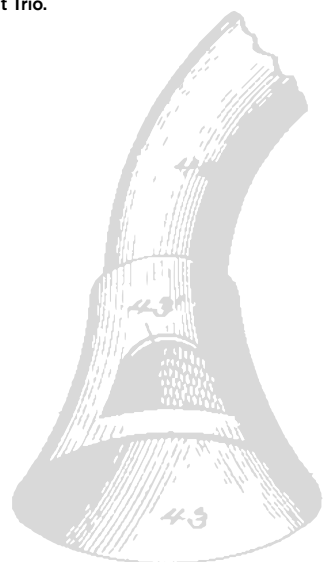


Fig. 8.

Columbia put out, arguably, the first blues recording to feature guitar, Helen Louise and Frank Ferera's "Palakiko Blues." It's arguable because, despite the name, the song doesn't sound very bluesy by current standards; for one thing, it's got too many chord changes. Ferera, whose main instruments were steel guitar and ukulele, is best known as the first major star in Hawaiian music, though he has bragging rights in at least three genres; he also played guitar on the first million-selling country record, Vernon Dalhart's "Wreck of the Old 97," released by Victor in 1924. (In a strange twist, two years after "Palakiko Blues" was recorded, Ferera's wife and guitar accompanist, Helen Louise, mysteriously vanished while she was on a steamboat from Los Angeles to Seattle and was never seen again.)

Before it became available on record, the blues in all its varieties was largely a regional style, ill-understood beyond the American South. Sheet music by composers like Handy had reached a far wider audience, but that was a filtered sort of blues—notation alone couldn't get across what practitioners of the style really sounded like. The result was a lot of records like Ferera's, which aimed to cash in on the blues trend but missed out on the music's principal characteristics. At first, most "blues" songs on record had a conventionally

theatrical tone, like something you might hear in a vaudeville house. Mamie Smith's famous "Crazy Blues," issued by the Okeh label in 1920, definitely fits that description, even though it's rightly remembered as the first blues song to be recorded by an African American. But soon, much rawer forms of blues would appear on shellac.

A turning point came in 1923, when three seminal blues artists made their first recordings. The first two, Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith, were singers. The third, Sylvester Weaver, was a guitar player. His instrumental "Guitar Blues," which the Louisville native recorded solo using a knife as a slide, is immediately recognizable as what we now call country blues. This was just the beginning; over the next decade, the deep blues of the Mississippi Delta would be documented definitively and would spread throughout the United States and the world.

### GOING ELECTRIC

The commercial success of Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey confirmed what earlier hits by Mamie Smith and Alberta Hunter had already suggested: there was money to be made in producing records for the African American market. Record company proprietors needed no further incentive, and so-called "race



**Before it became available on record, the blues in all its varieties was largely a regional style, ill-understood beyond the American South.**

records”—the counterpart to “hillbilly records” by white folk and country musicians—became a priority for labels such as Okeh, Emerson, Vocalion, Victor, and Paramount. The search for artists who might record the next big blues smash took talent scouts across the country, yielding musical treasures large and small. And the development of electrical recording by Henry Harrison, Joseph Maxfield, and others at Bell Laboratories in the mid-1920s—including the use of condenser microphones—meant that the subtle nuances of those treasures could now be heard in greater detail, with a sound quality much closer to life than crude acoustic recording methods had ever managed. (It would take future generations to note the irony of acoustic instruments being better served by electrical devices.)

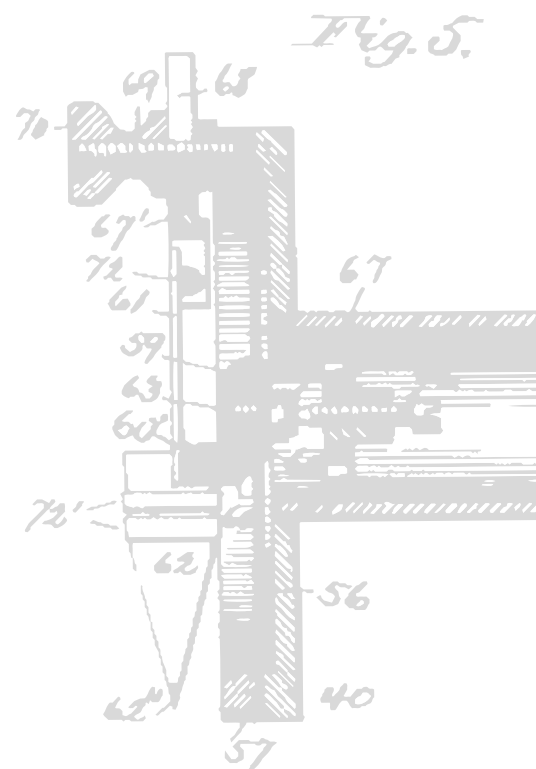
In addition, the rise of field recordings (i.e., recordings made outside a studio) and the explosion of radio dramatically altered the musical landscape for both players and listeners in the '20s. Field recordings meant that musicians no longer needed to go into a big city like New York or Chicago to make a record. And radio, which the labels viewed as a threat—the concept of the DJ had yet to be invented—prompted an important shift in musicians' focus, toward exactly the kinds of music that would most benefit from field recordings. For although the technology necessary for electrical recording had been originally created with radio broadcasting in mind, there was a major difference between listening to the radio and listening to a phonograph record: The former required a source of electricity and the latter didn't. As radio sales soared, record companies looked increasingly to the (literally) powerless people of the United States as their principal customer base. In an attempt to appeal to the country's more rural regions, the “race” and “hillbilly” categories grew rapidly.

The roll call of guitarists who emerged during this period reads like a blues pantheon: Blind Lemon Jefferson (first recorded 1925), Freddie Spruell (first recorded 1926), Blind Willie McTell (first recorded 1927), Tommy Johnson (first recorded 1927), Charley Patton (first recorded 1929), Booker White (first recorded 1930), Son House (first recorded 1930). All were exposed to large audiences for

the first time through records, and that exposure led to guitarists in one region of the country hearing, and in turn influencing, guitarists from other regions.

One slightly later-occurring name on the list of blues greats, Robert Johnson, now dwarfs the others in many listeners' opinion. But this wasn't the case when he made his small corpus of recordings in the mid-'30s, and it didn't become the case until well after those recordings were reissued 25 years later. Part of what made Johnson so appealing to blues fans in the '60s and beyond was the mystery of how he got to be such a skilled guitar player. Was there any truth to that legend about meeting the devil at the crossroads? While mulling that question, consider that Johnson belonged to the first generation of musicians who were able to listen to music on records with relative ease. If he heard something he liked on, say, a Tommy Johnson cut, he could play it over and over until he'd figured it out—a process that's second nature for today's guitarists but was completely new in the '20s and '30s.

Is this what Johnson actually did? No one will ever know. However, it's worth noting that as a songwriter, he seemed from the start to be much more acutely aware of the ideal running time of a 78-rpm side—between three and



The Edison cylinder machine and a case of cylinders, 1885



four minutes—than most other Delta players of his era. And without a doubt, the 78s he made in 1936 and 1937 won him a kind of posthumous fame that would have been impossible in the days before recording. When the legendary producer and impresario John Hammond went looking for Johnson to book him for the 1938 “From Spirituals to Swing” concert in New York, he found that the bluesman was already dead. So Hammond did the next best thing: He played one of Johnson’s records on the stage of Carnegie Hall.

### PRESERVING TRADITIONS

As radio and records made popular music more widely available to all, some inevitable changes took place. Because any musician could easily hear and copy what other musicians were doing, regional styles gradually lost their uniqueness. There was a growing perception among cognoscenti that artists’ rough edges were being smoothed out to win greater commercial favor. Music fans began making the same argument that would arise again and again when, say, swing bands added string sections, or Nashville entered its “countrypolitan” phase, or rock went progressive: “authentic” music was under threat.

It was partly an anticipation of this turn of events—the homogenization of American culture leading to valuable musical traditions being lost—that prompted musicologist John Lomax and his son Alan to travel around the nation with a 315-pound aluminum disc recorder in the trunk of their Ford, gathering material for the Library of Congress’ Archive of American Folk Song. (The sudden death of the elder Lomax’s wife in 1931 and the loss of his job at a Dallas bank due to the Great Depression were even greater motivating forces.) Between 1933 and 1942, the Lomaxes went to 33 states, plus the West Indies, the Bahamas, and Haiti; they recorded enough folk, blues, country, jazz, and gospel music to fill more than 10,000 discs. These include the first recordings of American guitar-playing icons Lead Belly (1933–34), Woody Guthrie (1940), and Muddy Waters (1941).

Ten years after the Lomaxes’ final field trip for the Library of Congress, the eccentric filmmaker Harry Smith offered a different take on the music of the ’20s and ’30s. Compiled by Smith from his own collection of 78s, the six-LP *Anthology of American Folk Music* was released by Folkways in 1952. It consisted solely of recordings made for commercial labels between 1926 and 1932. Unlike the Lomaxes’ recordings, which were intended as historical documentation and largely made during a period when the bottom had fallen out of the record business,

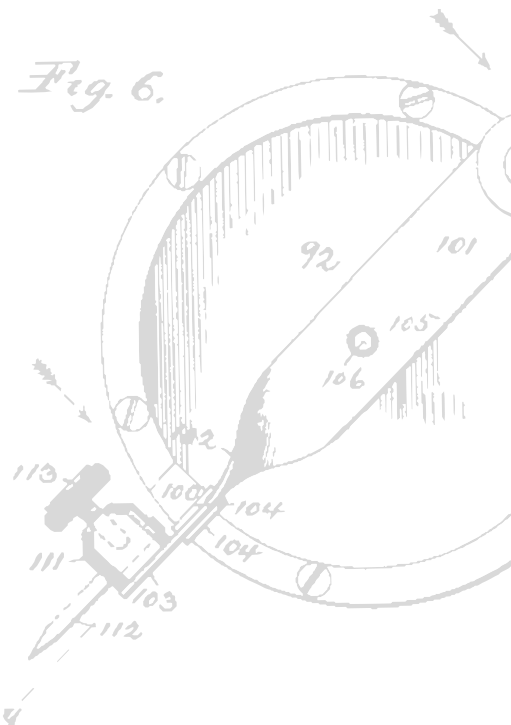


▲  
Musicologist John A. Lomax records Aunt Harriet McClintock in 1940 near Sumterville, Alabama

the tracks Smith compiled were products of that business’ early peak, issued with the hope of being bought by consumers.

But since the business of making non-classical records was still in its infancy, no one was sure what would sell, so labels took a chance on just about anything. As Smith showed, that freewheeling approach regularly struck gold. Through the *Anthology*, a new generation was introduced to the likes of Blind Willie Johnson, Ramblin’ Thomas, Clarence Ashley, and the Carter Family.

The work of Smith and the Lomaxes had an inestimable influence on the American folk revival of the ’50s and ’60s, including guitarists like Dave Van Ronk, Joan Baez, and Bob Dylan. By that time, however, the early recording era, typified by the shellac 78, had reached its end. A ban on shellac production during World War II temporarily crippled the record industry; the introduction of magnetic tape and vinyl discs a few years later forever transformed its practices. What happened next belongs in another article. But the big music-biz boom to come, far from being a standalone phenomenon, was inextricably rooted in the records of the ’20s and ’30s, that brief era when the recordings were electrical and the instruments were all acoustic. **AC**





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# GASLIGHT MEMORIES

Mississippi John Hurt's influence on the 1960s folk scene and beyond

BY STEVE JAMES

**I**n the close, dimly lit quarters of the subterranean Gaslight Cafe, on MacDougal Street in New York's Greenwich Village, a lot of what is now music history and legend happened as the basket was passed and the upstairs neighbors called in noise complaints. Besides hosting germinal performances by now-famous and not-so-famous names during the folk music boom of the 1960s, the Gaslight was a place where veteran masters of vintage songs and playing styles passed on music to younger singers and players.

Two of these budding musicians were Happy Traum and John Sebastian, exponents of a new generation of folk guitarists who were into fingerpicking and blues. A principal object of their musical attention was a diminutive farmer, newly arrived on the New York folk scene from his home in Carroll County, Mississippi. His name was John Hurt.

In the crowded guitar cosmos of the mid-1960s, the soft-spoken septuagenarian with the flannel shirt and derby hat was an unlikely star in the firmament. In terms of musical influence, however, his star burned just as brightly as that of any rock hero ever silhouetted against a light show. Traum and Sebastian are emblematic of uncounted players, this writer included, for whom Hurt was a guitar guide on that twisty path that winds through the realms of blues, folk, and that twangy hybrid now called roots music.

## A LATE DISCOVERY

For John Smith Hurt, the long road to the Gaslight started in rural Teoc and Avalon, Mississippi, where he was born and raised. (Biographer Phillip Ratcliffe cites Hurt's birthdate as March 8, 1892, rather than the long-circulated July 3, 1893.) These small farming communities are close to the bustling rail and cotton locus of Greenwood. Also a blues hotbed, Greenwood was the birthplace of Hurt's contemporary Furry Lewis and the home to Robert Johnson at the time of his death.

**"He'd show you stuff!  
And if you didn't get it,  
he'd show you again"**

JOHN SEBASTIAN

Largely self-taught, Hurt began playing at age nine on a guitar he called Black Annie. His local popularity led to a musical friendship with Carroll County fiddle wizard Willie Narmour, who brought him to Okeh Records in 1928. Sessions in Memphis and New York yielded 14 masterworks of blues, balladry, and gospel—none of which sold. So, Mississippi John Hurt returned to farming and social music.

In 1952, a couple of his rare Okeh titles, "Frankie" and "Spike Driver Blues," appeared on Harry Smith's iconic *Anthology of American Folk Music*, sending a rarified coterie of fingerstyle guitar cognoscenti back to the drawing board. Then, in 1963, record hound Dick Spottswood encouraged

his fellow musical adventurer Tom Hoskins, who was headed south, to check out the locale mentioned in Hurt's "Avalon Blues." And there he found the guitarist himself.

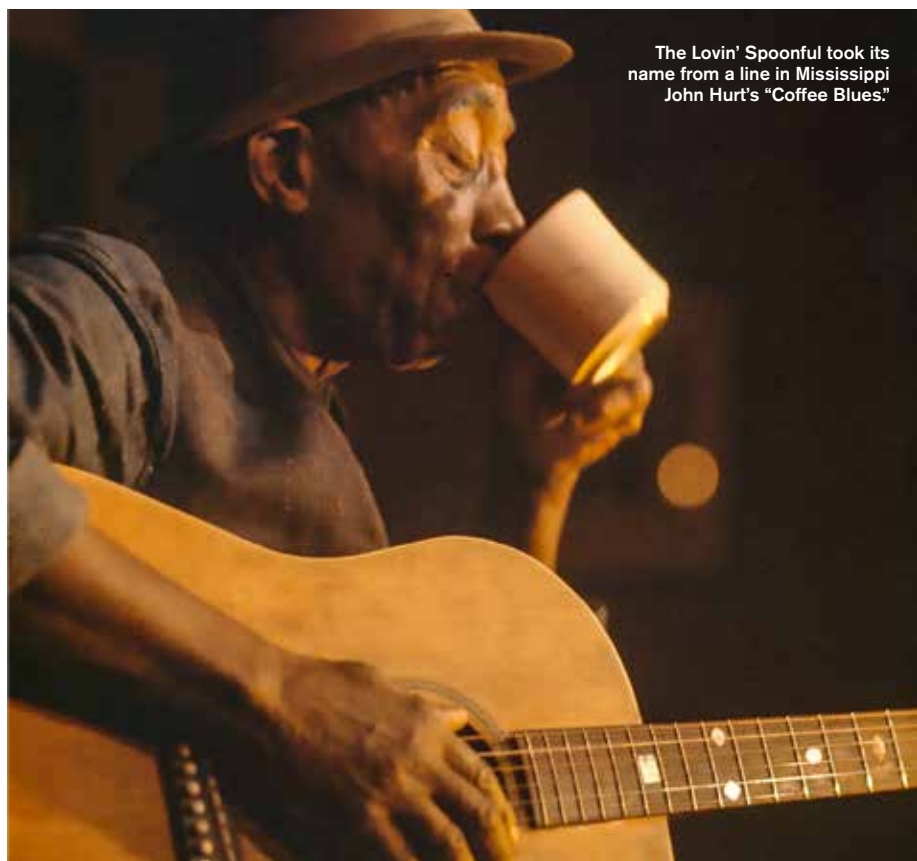
In a matter of just months after this "rediscovery," Mississippi John Hurt had played the Newport and Philadelphia Folk Festivals, appeared on Johnny Carson's *Tonight Show* and recorded for the Library of Congress. He also became a mainstay at folk clubs around the country. Among these was the Gaslight, where guitar-playing brothers Happy and Artie Traum were regulars, and John Sebastian would hasten over from across the street between sets playing harmonica for singer and songsmith Fred Neil.

## AN ENDURING LEGACY

More than a half-century later, Happy Traum and John Sebastian, like many of their colleagues, are still emphatic and enthusiastic when recounting not only the good times they had with Mississippi John Hurt, but also the transcendent value of what they learned from the guitarist. Traum started his Homespun music teaching series with a book of transcriptions of fingerstyle guitar arrangements and a handful of cassette tape lessons. The Homespun catalog now contains hundreds of video titles—including Traum and Sebastian's *The Fingerpicking Blues of Mississippi John Hurt*—and is a leading multimedia information source for players of folk and







The Lovin' Spoonful took its name from a line in Mississippi John Hurt's "Coffee Blues."

ROWLAND SCHERMAN



John Sebastian (left) and Happy Traum

© CATHERINE SEBASTIAN/CSP IMAGES

roots music worldwide. Traum also continues an active live performance schedule and hardly ever does a set without calling up the Hurt sound and spirit.

When John Sebastian formed a definitive folk-rock combo in the early 1960s, he described the sound as a "combination of Chuck Berry and Mississippi John Hurt," and named the group The Lovin' Spoonful after a line in Hurt's "Coffee Blues" (Learn how to play the song on page 58.) Like his old friend Traum, Sebastian rarely does a gig, if it's jug-band music or rhythm and blues, without raising a thumb to his mentor.

### WOODSTOCK MEETUP

Not long ago, Sebastian, Traum, and I decided to meet at Sebastian's Woodstock, New York, home to continue the party and the lesson. Levon Helm Boulevard—as the Highway 385 approach to Woodstock has been renamed, after the late member of the Band who lived nearby for decades—is clear for driving, but the frozen reminders of a lingering winter in the Hudson Valley are still piled on the roadside. It's three days before the beginning of spring, but green is conspicuously absent, with hardly a bud or bloom to be seen.

The directions are circuitous (make a left, an immediate right, down the hill, cross the creek, and it curves), but once at the Sebastian household, we're soon settled down for show-and-tell with freshly brewed coffee and a succession of instruments. These will include Yank Rachell's Harmony H-35 electric mandolin; a Gibson J-200 that belonged to Reverend Gary Davis; and Sebastian's signature model Martin, a jumbo whose fanciful crescent

### "All these years later and I'm still hearing new things in his playing."

#### HAPPY TRAUM

moon-and-stars fingerboard inlays are a tribute to Mississippi John Hurt.

Traum recalls the folk music community of Greenwich Village in the early '60s: "I became more interested in fingerpicking when I heard Tom Paley [of the New Lost City Ramblers] doing it," he says. "We were playing in Washington Square Park. There was a jug band here, a songwriter there, a banjo player. . . . None of us thought we'd make a living at it. Then record labels, managers, and agents began to get involved and the whole thing became more commercial and competitive."

"I grew up in the Village," adds Sebastian, son of John Sebastian, Sr., one of the world's foremost classical harmonica players. "I





mean, like, eating dirt in Washington Square Park with my childhood buddy John Hammond! We learned how to play together. His father was putting together that first Robert Johnson album [*King of the Delta Blues Singers*], so it was like: 'Hey, listen to this!' 'Come On in My Kitchen.' And we were like, 'What is he doing?'"

Traum evokes a similar mystery surrounding John Hurt's music that was resolved in part when he appeared at the Gaslight. "We had heard these two songs on the Harry Smith anthology, but we didn't even know what these people looked like! He made it seem so simple and accessible. All these years later and I'm still hearing new things in his playing."

This assessment is from a guitarist who at the time was also learning from such senior folk and blues pioneers as Brownie McGhee and Reverend Gary Davis. Often echoed by other players, Hurt's accessibility refers to the basic, melodic quality of his music when compared to McGhee's jazz-informed chordal sophistication or Davis' dense and idiosyncratic multi-voiced gospel blues and ragtime inventions.

Sebastian concurs, remembering performers like Lightnin' Hopkins and John Lee Hooker, who had been major blues recording and performing stars long before they dressed down and took to the folk circuit, and lacked the rural egalitarianism Hurt displayed in his character. "He'd show you stuff! And if you didn't get it, he'd show you again," Sebastian says.

Sebastian also remembers some of the less cheery exponents of blues guitar style who were part of the '60s folk rediscovery and revival, referring in particular to the dark wizardry of Skip James. "Some of these guys were kind of scary, but John Hurt had this sort of Meher Baba quality," he says, referring to the late Indian spiritual master.

Indeed, John Hurt took to his sudden and considerable fame with equanimity and made friends easily. These included the managers of the Gaslight—Clarence Hood and his son Sam—who were fellow Mississippians. He formed bonds with contemporaries Elizabeth Cotten and Sonny Terry and also befriended young folk singers like his frequent companions Patrick Sky and Buffy Saint Marie. Everybody from Tom Paxton to Dave Van Ronk had a John Hurt story and cadged a John Hurt guitar lick.

If the man from Avalon had any idea how important he was, he never let on. John Smith Hurt returned to his home in Avalon in the autumn of 1966 and died of cardiac arrest in the hospital in nearby Grenada on November 2nd of that year.

AC

## WHAT HE PLAYED

At the time that he resumed performing and recording in 1963, Mississippi John Hurt did not own a guitar. Photographs from this period show him playing a refinished Gibson J-45 with a crescent moon inlay on the fingerboard, on loan from Tom Hoskins. The blonde, slotted-headstock guitar Hurt used for his groundbreaking set at the Newport Folk Festival, in 1963, has recently resurfaced. It was made by the early 20th-century company Emory and also belonged to Hoskins. Additional footage from the festival shows Hurt playing "Casey Jones" on a Harmony Sovereign 12-string. The instrument he played on Pete Seeger's *Rainbow Quest* show was made for him as a gift by Pennsylvania luthier John Alderson.

In 1964, the Newport Foundation gave Hurt carte blanche to obtain an instrument of his own, and he made the purchase at Marc Silber's Fretted Instruments in New York. Silber relates that, although he encouraged him to buy a Martin, Hurt selected a less expensive Guild F-30 with a sunburst finish, saying that he always wanted a guitar that was "two colors at the same time." Photographs show Hurt with the Guild and a variety of other guitars, including a National and a Dobro.

For his Vanguard recording sessions, in 1965, Hurt played a 1930 Martin OM-45 loaned by Stefan Grossman. (See Grossman's website, [guitarvideos.com](http://guitarvideos.com), for a host of instructional videos on Hurt's playing.) Hurt's sunburst Guild F-30 was curated in the 1990s by Harry Tuft at the Denver Folklore Center. The strings, unchanged since Hurt's passing, were a light-gauge bronze wound set. —SJ

## THE ODD FATE OF HURT'S GUILD F-30

Hurt played in Philadelphia many times between 1963 and 1966, and when he was in the area, a guitarist named Jerry Ricks helped him get to venues and gave him a place to stay. After Hurt's death, Ricks acquired his Guild F-30 and later moved to Denver, where he got a job working for Harry Tuft at the Denver Folklore Center. Ricks ended up selling the guitar to a friend of Tuft's, David Ferretta, and as the unofficial executor of Ferretta's will, Tuft took ownership of it after Ferretta died unexpectedly in 1994.

In the fall of 2017, Tuft received a call from pop star John Oates, of Hall & Oates fame, inquiring about the guitar. As luck would have it, Oates had taken guitar lessons from Jerry Ricks back in the day and knew the guitar well. Ricks even brought the F-30 to New York when Hall & Oates were recording their first two albums, and according to Oates, "If I'm playing acoustic guitar on *Abandoned Luncheonette* or *Whole Oats*, it's Mississippi John Hurt's guitar."

As Tuft recounts, "Oddly enough, he [Oates] was the only one who could authenticate its provenance. We arrived at a figure fair both to him and to David's daughter, and I had the Folklore Center ship it to him. I can't emphasize the serendipity of the experience too much. Without selling it to him, it became just another F-30 Guild from 1964, which was in only fair shape." Oates currently owns the guitar and played it on his latest album, *Arkansas*, which began as a tribute to Mississippi John Hurt. —Bill Evans



COURTESY OF JOHN OATES

# All in the Right Shoulder

How Mississippi John Hurt played—and how he is interpreted

BY STEVE JAMES

**A**lthough John Hurt's style and repertoire are often imitated, his guitar sound is hard to duplicate. He picked with his thumb, index, and middle fingers, bracing his ring and little finger lightly on the face in front of the treble foot of the bridge. He wore no thumb or fingerpicks, producing a clear, bell-like tone with a combination of nail and what must have been some very well developed callouses.

The strength of Hurt's hands and arms is a matter of record (as in oft-told arm-wrestling vignettes from the Gaslight), but he never overworked his instrument. Playing downstrokes with a hyperextended thumb and all upstrokes with evenly flexed fingers, he made judicious use of palm muting, usually opting for a wide-open, ringing sound. He often thumbed double-stops or chords on the low strings to emphasize the backbeats and to add harmonic color, and his control of individual string dynamics and chord overtones was remarkable.

The near metronomic tempo of the alternating bass lines that framed most of Hurt's arrangements is given additional drive by his subtle feel for playing slightly behind the back beats. "It's all in the right shoulder," he told guitarist Marc Silber when asked how he got so much sound out of a guitar.

Many of Hurt's songs are based around two or three conventional first-position chord shapes. The guitarist often used his thumb to fret the low string. He employed both standard and alternate tunings, like open G and D, and often added melodic-interest texture to a repeating tonic-and-fifth bass line by throwing in a third or even a sixth (as in "Spike Driver Blues"). Hurt sometimes used a pedal tone—a single low note through consecutive chords, as an A on the A and D chords in "Monday Morning Blues," "Coffee Blues" and "Casey Jones."

Typically, Hurt played within position, maintaining a chord shape with his second and third

fingers on the low strings while adding melody and blue-note fills on top with deft manipulation of his first and fourth fingers, the latter of which could jump from string to string fast enough to fret eighth-note passages (witness "Spike Driver" and "Casey Jones"). Although Hurt liked cowboy chords, he was not bound by standard fingerings. If a note he needed was up the neck on the first string, he would affect a low voice by fretting the same note two octaves below on string 6 or by using an open string to create an interesting, if unconventional, harmony.

## IN THE POCKET

Hurt's guitar accompaniments were generally short and melodic, but he hardly ever played two consecutive verses exactly the same way. In demonstrating his style of playing, John Sebastian, the jug band and rock 'n' roll veteran, zeroes in on the pocket (rhythmic feel) and riffs that make Hurt's music move.

### Example 1

G7

The musical notation for Example 1 shows a guitar riff in G7. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 4/4 time signature. The melody is written on a single staff, and the bass line is written on a six-string guitar staff. The riff consists of 12 measures, with the first measure marked '5' and the last measure marked 'etc.'.



**Example 2**

Example 2 is a guitar exercise in E major, 4/4 time, consisting of 12 measures. The key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The exercise is divided into three systems of four measures each.

**System 1 (Measures 1-4):** Labeled E7. The melody starts on E4, moves to F#4, then G#4, and ends on E4. The bass line starts on E2, moves to F#2, then G#2, and ends on E2.

**System 2 (Measures 5-8):** Labeled A, A7, E7. The melody starts on A4, moves to B4, then C#5, and ends on A4. The bass line starts on A2, moves to B2, then C#3, and ends on A2.

**System 3 (Measures 9-12):** Labeled B7, E7. The melody starts on B4, moves to C#5, then D5, and ends on B4. The bass line starts on B2, moves to C#3, then D3, and ends on B2.

**Example 3**

Example 3 is a guitar exercise in D major, 4/4 time, consisting of 8 measures. The key signature has two sharps (F#, C#). The exercise is divided into two systems of four measures each.

**System 1 (Measures 1-4):** Labeled D, A, A7. The melody starts on D4, moves to E4, then F#4, and ends on D4. The bass line starts on D2, moves to E2, then F#2, and ends on D2.

**System 2 (Measures 5-8):** Labeled D, A. The melody starts on D4, moves to E4, then F#4, and ends on D4. The bass line starts on D2, moves to E2, then F#2, and ends on D2.

In **Example 1**, (p. 36) Sebastian plays patterns inspired by “Spike Driver Blues,” Hurt’s classic one-chord take on the John Henry ballad. Sebastian frets the low G with his third finger throughout. In his interpretation, he does a bass line alternating steadily between the sixth and fourth strings. As for the melody notes, he frets the first-string G, as well as the second (third-fret D) and flatted third (third-fret B♭) with his fourth finger; he grabs the first-string F with his first finger to form a G7 chord.

The principal differences between Sebastian’s and Hurt’s versions are in the thumb-picked bass notes. Sebastian, like Hurt, moves his second finger to stop the fourth-string E, using this note alternately with the open D from the third measure throughout the piece. Hurt plays the E in the bass steadily through bars 3 and 4 only, then adds a fifth-string B in subsequent measures.

In his reading of “Avalon Blues,” the song that led to Hurt’s rediscovery, Sebastian again breaks the arrangement down to basics. As shown in **Example 2**, he uses a three-note bass line on each chord shape, adding the fifth-string B to the E chord, a low E to the A chord, and a

second-fret F♯ to the B7 shape. Playing way behind the backbeats in the Hurt style, Sebastian cops one of Hurt’s favorite riffs around the E chord and also borrows an A-to-A7 chord change. A four-note bass run connects the B7 and E chords in measure 10.

### HIGH MELODIC RIFFING

Happy Traum, with his vast teaching experience, knows how to get to the heart of Hurt’s playing particularly well. He is fond of the guitarist’s melodic riffing up the neck (**Example 3**) and demonstrates this approach using a D chord at frets 5–7, with the open first string used in a clean transition to a first-position A chord. The phrase used around the E7 chord in bars 9 and 10 is similar to the one in Sebastian’s arrangement of “Avalon Blues,” with the addition of a high G♯—a real finger-stretcher.

Also worth practicing is the pretty turnaround that Traum details around the A chord in the final bars. Note how the open A string acts as a pedal tone—again, a favorite device of Hurt’s—on the A and D chords. Traum uses a four-beat alternating bass line throughout this example. You’ll hear Hurt sometimes insert a two-note-per-measure

bass figure for effect at the beginning of a measure when playing “Avalon Blues.”

### LESS IS MORE

In preparation for my turn in the sequence, I listened to recordings and watched footage of Hurt at work—there are excellent black-and-white close-ups from Pete Seeger’s 1965 *Rainbow Quest* television show. What a player he was! I checked out Hurt’s version of the “Casey Jones” canticle. (Casey’s fatal train wreck happened on April 29, 1900, near Vaughan, Mississippi—about 40 miles down the line from where a young Hurt was starting to learn guitar.)

In **Example 4**, as with Sebastian’s “Spike Driver,” your fourth finger gets a fretting workout, and the melody notes are the same. Listen for that quick C-chord change in the third bar; also add a major third (B) to the G-to-D bass line in bar 6 just before the change to A. Again, the open A string is pedaled through the A chord and that two-beat change to D just before the resolution on G in bar 8—another common Hurtism, which typifies the less-is-more approach that makes his guitar music so enjoyable to listen to and to learn. **AC**

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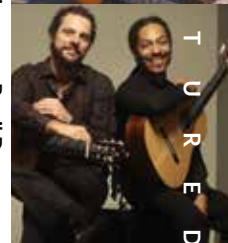
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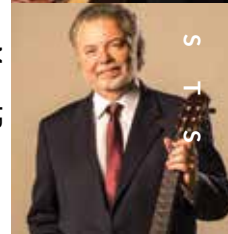
Brasil Duo



Marcin Dylla



Manuel Barrueco







9

E7 A A7

#### Example 4

G G7 C G

\*On G chords, brush against open string 3 when picking string 4.

1. G A D G

2. G



When it comes to street performing, it definitely pays to know your audience.

HERE'S HOW

BILL EVANS

# Taking it to the Streets

5 essential tips for busking guitarists

BY PAULINE FRANCE

**W**e've all seen street musicians providing background music for bustling city-goers. We might've felt sorry for them as we hurried by, or stopped dead in our tracks to acknowledge their musical prowess.

But have you ever stopped to think about why they're performing there and what exactly goes into busking? To answer these questions, I reached out to a handful of musicians who've been around the block—literally. And I was surprised by what I learned. It turns out there's a lot more to street performing than just propping your guitar case open next to a tip sign.

## 1 DON'T MIND THE POMPOUS PASSERSBY

Street performing is a commendable act of bravery, but some people look down on it, thinking buskers are underprivileged. Those

people don't matter, but for your own sake it's important to know how to deal with them.

Los Angeles-based guitarist and singer-songwriter Segun Oluwadele was looking for a job he could easily manage while juggling his studies at USC, and tried street performing. He soon noticed unfounded reactions from spectators. "People think that a street performer is someone down on his luck," Oluwadele says. "It's a weird connotation, but it's changed in L.A. over a period of time due to the number of street performers who have made a name for themselves."

Plus, if street performing were uncool, U2 wouldn't have agreed to a goose bump-inducing performance set up by Jimmy Fallon at New York's 42nd Street subway station in 2015. So if you're faced with someone aloof, remember that how a person treats you says more about them than it does about you.

## 2 KNOW YOUR LOCAL LAWS

Laws and permit applications vary by location and by type of performance, so your best bet is to visit your local city office or website to learn the exact legal requirements.

In some places, like New York subway stations, a permit alone won't suffice. Katherine Slingluff, whose band Paper Anniversary plays in subway corridors, says, "There's an assumption that you can set up and play anywhere. But in the more heavily trafficked subway stations, you have to get a particular permit and go through an audition process." Paper Anniversary auditioned through Music Under New York, one of the MTA's arts programs. "We now have the opportunity to play as much as we want in different subway stations," Slingluff says.

Not all cities are as rigorous as New York when it comes to vetting buskers. For instance,



Santa Monica, California, doesn't hold auditions but does require a permit. It's fairly simple to get one, but you still have to follow rules like rotating locations and playing a certain number of feet away from businesses and other performers. That said, wherever you work, don't risk getting kicked to the curb. With laws and permits, it's always best to play by the rules instead of by ear.

### 3 USE STREET-FRIENDLY GEAR

A power outlet is a rare commodity on the street—and lugging heavy gear can put a damper on your mojo—so you have to prepare accordingly. “Roland makes a lot of things specifically for street performers,” says Oluwadele. “The Micro Cube and Cube Street are portable and battery-operated.”

For PA needs, L.A.-based singer-songwriter Katie Ferrara swears by the Mackie FreePlay, a lightweight all-in-one system with AC or battery operation. “If you sing as part of your act, I also recommend the AirTurn goSTAND,” says Ferrara. “It’s a collapsible microphone/tablet stand that folds into a backpack that helped me tremendously when I was busking throughout Europe.”

### 4 EMBRACE THE HUSTLE

While on some days you can get lucky and rake in hundreds for a few hours of street performing, there might be nights where you'll only bring home six bucks. But there's help out there.

Chuck Gullo, president and CEO of Music from the Streets, founded the organization to create a launching pad for street musicians while raising awareness about the issue of homelessness. A former vice president of A&M records, Gullo says, “When I was starting this company, the music industry was at a point where the A&R departments were more about signing artists with their eyes than their ears. Music unites people like nothing else, and homelessness is not a sexy topic. Why not let music be the driving force?”

Music from the Streets has an advisory committee of industry heavyweights and a large group of celebrity endorsers. It's a valuable resource for street performers seeking a spotlight, or for people wanting to support the cause.

### 5 GO WITH THE FLOW

Mark Goffeney, a guitarist who went from playing in the streets of San Diego, California, to touring with the seminal Latin American rock band Maná, says it's critical to be able to switch your act in a split second.

“The people who don't do well street performing are those who have a set list and try to

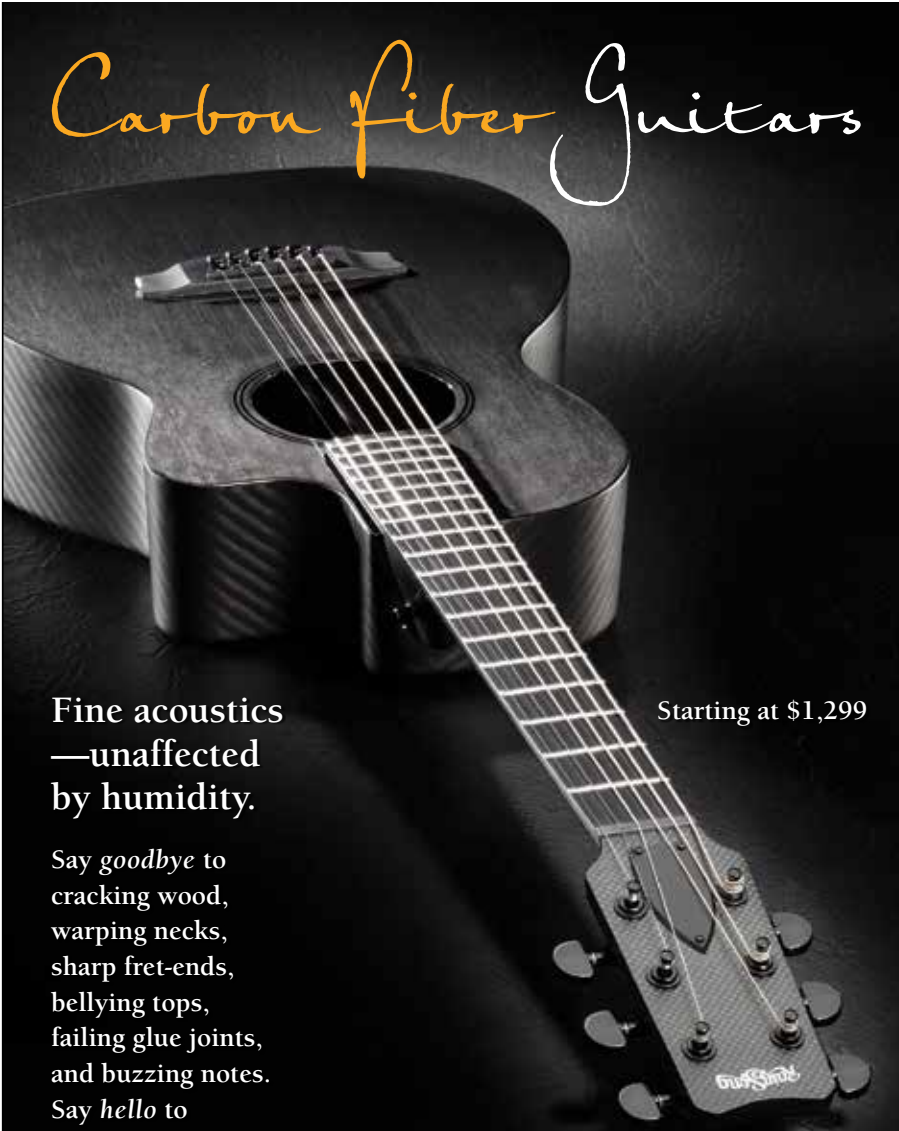
play the song exactly right from beginning to end,” Goffeney observes. “Have no set list and play what works for the people that you're around. If you're playing a song that you love and nobody is stopping, let it go. Be smart enough to start playing a Maná song when you see a group of Spanish speakers passing by!”

In other words, know your audience.

To build energy, Goffeney recommends feeding off the moments you catch a spectator giving you a glance. “There's a look of intrigue

that comes across their face, and it's golden,” Goffeney says. “They light up, their disposition changes, and it's very addictive when what you're doing is enticing enough to make a person stop and listen.”

So at the end of your performance, whether your guitar case is brimming with bills or not, make sure to enjoy the ultimate thrill of busking—that soul-nourishing double take you get from a stranger who stopped because of your music. **AC**



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# Note Finder

Learning the names of the pitches on the fretboard—and on the staff

BY GRETCHEN MENN

## THE PROBLEM

The identity of the notes on your fretboard is a mystery. Whenever someone uses music theory terms, you feel intimidated and extricate yourself as quickly as possible from the conversation.

## THE SOLUTION

Invest some time to systematically familiarize yourself with the fundamentals of music. Demystify the fretboard through applying this knowledge and building fluency.

**M**any guitar players have an unreasonable aversion to anything that even smells like music theory. Misconceptions and excuses abound: It's too confusing; it's creatively stifling; it's just rules, and music is about breaking the rules.

Such beliefs are ultimately self-defeating and unfounded. I can't name a single accomplished musician who has studied music and regrets it. Great music can certainly be created without knowledge of music theory, but here's the point: Your brain will conceptualize music in *some* way. Why not have it be in the way that allows you to communicate most freely with other musicians? It will stifle your creativity only as much as being literate has impeded your ability to express your thoughts, ideas, and feelings in your native language.

I often see musicians suffering creatively and professionally by rejecting music study. The coping mechanisms they concoct require far more effort with less consistent results than simply following what hundreds of years of music education has determined to be the clearest path. Sure, you *can* create your own language, but how helpful is it for communicating if you're the only one who speaks it?

In this lesson, you'll dive into the fundamentals of pitch and apply that understanding to the guitar. If you can count to 12 and know the alphabet up to letter G, you'll be fine. There will be some terms to learn, but what's a few new words in your vocabulary, especially if they pertain to something important to you? You won't find any tablature here, as the goal is to get you comfortable with standard notation. So shed the intimidation and reject the temptation to fall into the proud ignorance



that persists in guitar culture. It's time to get literate in the language you love.

## 1 LEARN THE THEORY

First some terminology. Even if this is review for you, brushing up on terms ensures a recent, specific foundation as you move ahead. "Pitch" or "note" refers to the highness/lowness of a sound. There are 12 different pitches in the Western tonal system: A, A#/B $\flat$ , B, C, C#/D $\flat$ , D, D#/E $\flat$ , E, F, F#/G $\flat$ , G, and G#/A $\flat$ .

Pitches that are represented just with a letter are known as natural notes. Accidentals are symbols that alter a note. A sharp (#) raises a note a half step, and a flat ( $\flat$ ) lowers a note a half step. A natural ( $\natural$ ) cancels a sharp or flat. More on accidentals in a future lesson, but for now just know that each accidental applies to the same note throughout a measure (as designated by the vertical lines on the staff) or until it is canceled by another accidental in the same measure.

On a piano, as shown in **Figure 1**, natural notes are the white keys, and the sharp and flat notes are the black keys. The closest distance between notes is a half step (e.g., A–A# or B–C). Two half steps are equivalent to a whole step (e.g., A–B or B–C#). The guitar has a different layout from that of the piano; half steps are between adjacent frets, as demonstrated in **Figure 2**.

Some notes have two names, such as A#/B $\flat$ . These are known as *enharmonic* equivalents. Context will determine which name applies. More on that in a future lesson, but for now

just know that A# is the same note as B $\flat$ , C# is equivalent to D $\flat$ , and so on.

You should also consider the half steps between two sets of natural notes: B–C and E–F. If you see a B# or E# in notation, they are enharmonically C and F, respectively; similarly, C $\flat$  and F $\flat$  are the same as B and E.

## 2 STUDY THE STAFF

Pitches are notated on a staff—a system of five lines and four spaces. A clef is a symbol that occurs at the beginning of a staff to indicate which lines and spaces are to be associated with which notes. Guitar is written in treble clef, also known as G clef, as it encircles the line associated with G above middle C. (Note that the guitar is written an octave above sounding pitch.)

It's commonly taught to memorize the lines (E G B D F) and spaces (F A C E), as shown in **Example 1**. You can also just locate the G line as designated by the treble clef, and count up or down alphabetically. Ledger lines, depicted in **Example 2**, extended the staff upward and downward. **Example 3** shows the range of a typical steel-string guitar, which has 20 frets, in standard tuning.

## 3 APPLY THE THEORY

With an understanding of some basics, apply that knowledge to the fretboard, and boost your fluency with some memorization drills. **Example 4** shows the six open strings—low to high, E, A, D, G, B, and E—as they appear on the staff.





Fig. 1

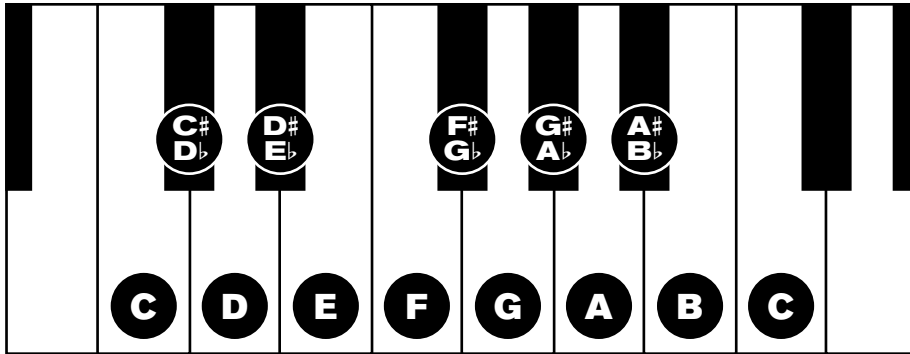
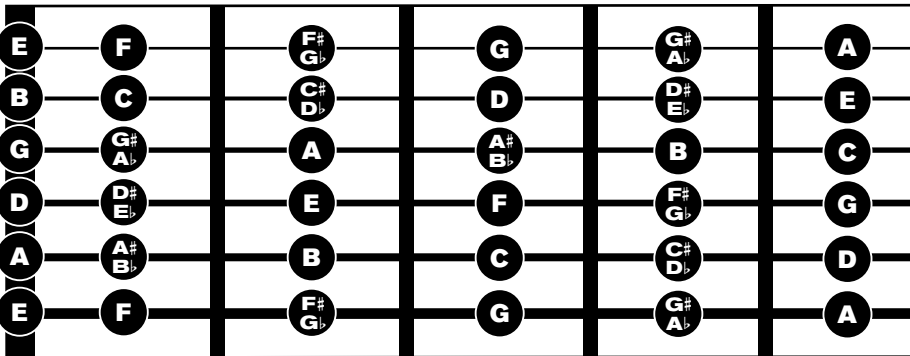


Fig. 2



The first step toward fretboard demystification is to memorize each open string; the second step is to learn the notes on each individual string. I recommend starting with the low E. You'll get two for one, as the note names will be the same as on the high E. Here's how to practice: Set a timer

for 10 minutes. Focus on the notes from the open E up to the sixth fret, starting with just the open string and the first fret, and adding notes one at a time. Say them aloud as you play them. **Example 5** will get you started. Try to come up with different combinations, or enlist a practice buddy to

throw out random notes for you. When the timer goes off, you're done for the day.

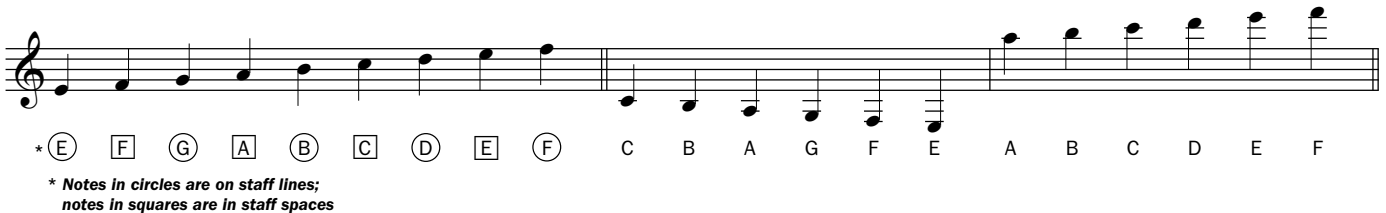
Take a couple of minutes the next day to review, then work in the same way from frets 7 to 12 of the E string. The following day, start with a full review of the E string, and then tackle the first six frets of the A string. Continue in this way until you've gone through each string. Spend a few days going between strings, looking at notes in various positions, trying to disorient yourself so you can then reorient and deepen your learning. Apply this type of note identification to lines or licks you know. In about two weeks, and with only about two hours invested, you should have vastly increased your confidence of the notes on the fretboard.

Any path of education means a learning curve, which may feel overwhelming at times. Keep with it. Go slowly and methodically. Review and reread as often as necessary. You'll start to see the patterns and relationships that make music theory so comprehensible, so beautifully logical. And there are benefits beyond what you might expect. You've got this!

For further reading, refer to the music theory textbook *Tonal Harmony* by Stefan Kostka and Dorothy Payne.

Gretchen Menn is a guitarist and composer based in the San Francisco Bay Area. She writes, records, and performs original music and is a member of the popular Led Zeppelin tribute band Zepparella. [gretchenmenn.com](http://gretchenmenn.com)

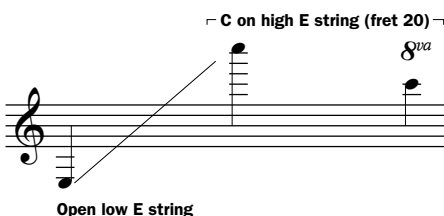
### Example 1 Staff and Clef



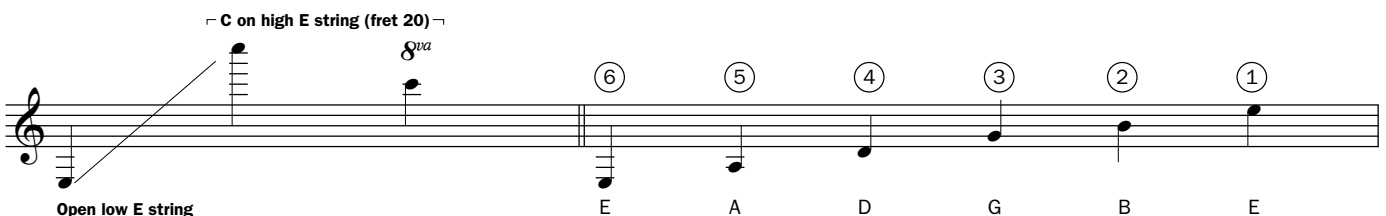
### Example 2 Ledger Lines



### Example 3 Guitar Range



### Example 4 Open Strings



Cont. on p. 44

# THE BASICS

Cont. from p. 43

## Example 5

E F E F E F# E F F# E F# F E F F# G F# F E F E F# G F#  
 E F E G E F G G# G Gb F E G F# Gb F# E G G# Gb F E F# Gb  
 G G# A F E F F# G# A G G# A F A F# G A G# G Gb F# A E A  
 E F G A A# A Ab G G# A Ab A# E A A# G# A# F# A E G A A# F# A Ab A# E

etc.

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# Made to Shine

Few notes yield vast sounds on Bill Frisell's sparse solo arrangement

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

One day last March, I was on my morning drive, listening to the San Francisco Bay Area jazz station KCSM, when a gorgeous solo acoustic-guitar piece, striking in its simplicity, came on the radio. I pulled off to the side of the road to have a closer listen. The artist's identity seemed unmistakable—and sure enough, after the selection ended, the station's host confirmed that it was Bill Frisell, playing a composition from his latest album, *Music IS* (Okeh).

Now 67, Frisell is a national treasure who has for decades been one of the guitar's most original and influential practitioners. Though he's generally classified as a jazz musician, he has left not one thread of American music unexamined in his work both as a leader and as a sideman, with improvising composers like saxophonist John Zorn and drummer Paul Motian, singer-songwriters like Elvis Costello and Lucinda Williams, and many other collaborators.

Frisell is also known for his affability, and when I reached out for permission to run his composition in this magazine, he graciously agreed and even emailed me a picture of the original handwritten manuscript, which accompanies the notation here. Learning the piece—"Made to Shine"—not only will give you a lovely selection to add to your repertoire, its concepts will give you ideas that you can apply to your own music.

## IN THE COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUSNESS

Frisell woke up one morning in the early 2000s and quickly jotted down a folk-like melody with a main chord sequence that he realized was identical to that of the hymn "Amazing Grace." "It felt like something out of the collective unconsciousness," he says. "Just a tune that had been floating around in the air, or maybe similar to something I had

heard the Kingston Trio do when I was a kid, buried very deep down in there in the far recesses of my memory."

For his 2001 album *Blues Dream*, Frisell used this new-and-old tune as the source for two pieces with decidedly different characters, "Pretty Flowers Were Made for Blooming" and "Pretty Stars Were Made to Shine." The former, a study in creative instrumentation, incorporates electric guitar with ambient effects, steel guitar, horns, bowed bass, and drums, and is played as a spacey waltz; the latter is a more straightforward country-and-western quartet version in cut time.

When playing a weeklong residency at the now-shuttered New York City music club the Stone in August 2017, Frisell revisited his tune in an unaccompanied context. "I'm not sure if *disturbing* is the right word to describe this, but after a show one night, a guy who was working



Freely



Chords: A, A<sup>aug</sup>, D/F<sup>♯</sup>, A/E

*let ring throughout*

Chords: A, F(♯4)

Chords: A, A<sup>7</sup>, D/F<sup>♯</sup>, F<sup>major7</sup>, To Coda

1. Chords: A, E, D, A/E

2. Chords: A, E, D/F<sup>♯</sup>, A



there, Don De Tora, thanked me for playing Ry Cooder's version of Jesse James," Frisell says, laughing at the similarity to his own composition.

### THE CONCEPTS

Not long after the Stone gig, Frisell recorded a new studio version of his tune—the one I heard on the radio. Where "Pretty Flowers Were Made for Blooming" is about a maximum of tonal colors and shadings, the more recent recording of "Made to Shine," transcribed here, works in the opposite direction, stripping the tune to its essence.

Frisell more often plays the electric guitar than the acoustic, sometimes shaping his sound with a bevy of electronic effects, but he recorded "Made to Shine" on an early-'40s Gibson J-45, without any overdubs. Scan through the music and you'll see an apparent economy of harmony. In the A section, most of the chords are negotiated with just two notes, while in the B section the chords are comprised of three or four notes. The effect is a clear and singing sound, free from harmonic clutter.

Frisell says he arrived at this approach—which he makes extensive use of in all

settings—through his studies with the late jazz guitarist Jim Hall. "Jim Hall is someone who would find the richest sound or imply something denser with just a few notes. I was lucky to take lessons with Jim Hall, and he would have me harmonize scales using different intervals. That showed me the power that just two notes at a time could have, rather than playing gigantic six-note chords all the time," says Frisell, adding that the jazz pianist Thelonious Monk is another big influence on his harmonic thinking. (For more on Monk, see Adam Levy's Weekly Workout in the January 2016 issue.)

Speaking of harmony, as is clear from Frisell's manuscript, the guitarist uses a bunch of interesting substitutions in "Made to Shine" (with respect to the original composition), sometimes changing a chord's character by adjusting just one note. In bar 2, he transforms the A chord into an A augmented triad by playing an F instead of E. This small adjustment lends a kind of haunting character to the piece.

### THE TECHNIQUES AT HAND

On paper, "Made to Shine" looks approachable, and on one hand it isn't so technically

challenging. But on the other hand, it's not easy to make the guitar sing like Frisell does on the recording. You need to play the melody, shown in the upstemmed notes, louder than the other notes, but not too forcefully, as this is a delicate piece. This is especially important in a spot like bar 15, where you have to make sure that the fourth-fret F# and the open D string do not obscure the ringing second-fret A, held from the previous measure.

A good way to achieve the singing sound is to seek out the most efficient fingerings. For example, in bars 1 and 2, maintain a barre at fret 2 across strings 1–5, grab the fifth-fret E with your fourth finger, and, keeping that note held, stop the third-fret F with your second finger.

Of course, given its folk-like nature, "Made to Shine" is prime material for your own interpretation. Try playing it with different chord changes, in a different key, or even in an alternate tuning. The basic melody, as Frisell has demonstrated, is quite durable. As he puts it, the piece is ready to "sprout new branches." **AC**

# 47<sup>th</sup>



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Cont. from p. 47

**B** **F#m** **G13** **Fmaj7** **D7/F#**

21

**F#m** **G13** **Fmaj7** **D/F#**

25

**F#m** **G9** **Fmaj7** **D7/F#**

29

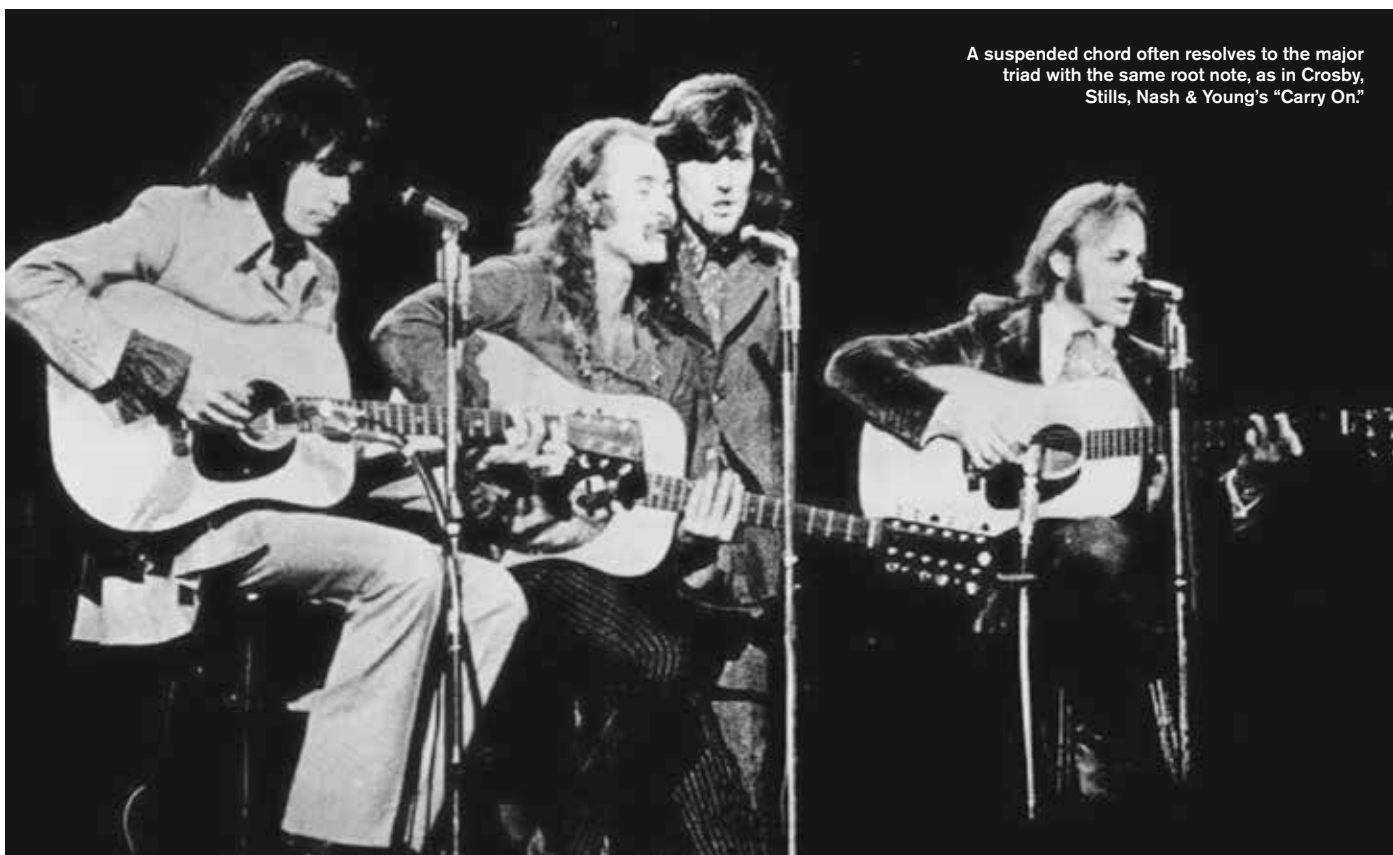
**F#m** **G13** **Fmaj7#11** **D/F#** **D.S. al Coda**

33

**Coda**

**A** **E** **D/F#** **A/E**

37



A suspended chord often resolves to the major triad with the same root note, as in Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young's "Carry On."

# Suspended in Harmony

How to harness the power of sus chords in your music

BY JANE MILLER

When you see the suffix *-sus* in a chord, as in *Dsus4* or *Dsus2*, how do you know what to play? The *sus* is short for *suspended* and it's telling you to replace the third of a chord with the fourth or second. Since the third of a chord is the note that indicates major (natural third) or minor (flatted third), suspended chords have an ambiguous sound. This open-ended quality can lend interest and tension to music. Sus chords are also great—and diverse—tools for dressing up otherwise plain progressions.

In this lesson, you'll look at some sus-chord symbols commonly seen in popular music and learn how to play them on guitar. But first, it's important to understand the construction of chords so that you are able to find the third and replace it with the indicated note. Major triads have three notes: the root, the third, and the fifth. Start with the name of the chord, such as D major, and call that root note 1 (D). Take the third and fifth notes of

the major scale of the same name—in this case, D major (D E F# G A B C#)—and you have a D major triad: D (1) F# (3) A (5).

## WEEK ONE

In a *sus4*, the most common type of suspended chord, the third is replaced with the fourth. So, take your D chord and swap out the third (F#) for the fourth note of the scale (G) and you have a *Dsus4* (D G A). Try the most common *Dsus4* chord, with the fourth as the highest note (**Example 1**).

In context, a suspended chord often resolves to the major triad with the same root note. This familiar sound, similar to what Carly Simon played in "Anticipation" or what's heard in Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young's "Carry On," is shown in **Example 2** with the progressions *Dsus4*–D and *Asus4*–A. To play the first two bars, start with a basic open-D chord grip and, keeping that shape depressed, add your fourth finger to the fourth-fret G. Then, to resolve to

the D chord, lift your fourth finger from string 1, as the D chord's third is pre-fretted. Similarly, in bar 3, fret an open-A chord with your first, second, and third fingers, and grab the fourth (D) of the *Asus4* chord (A D E) with your fourth finger, this time on string 2.

**Example 3** runs through a common three-chord progression (I–IV–V) in the key of A major, with *Esus4* joining the party. Use the

## Beginners' Tip #1

A good way to learn new chords from ones you already know is to write out note names across the top of a chord diagram, like D A D F# for an open D chord. Then, at the bottom of the diagram, label the function of each note, such as 1 5 1 3. That way, you can easily locate the third and replace it with a suspension.





WEEK 1

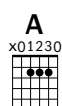
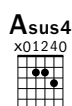
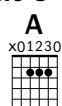
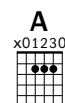
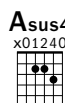
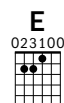
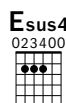
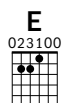
Example 1



Example 2



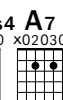
Example 3

WEEK 2

Example 4

Example 5



same fingering trick as you did with the Dsus4 and Asus4 chords: fret the Esus4's fourth, A, with your fourth finger on string 3, then let go to the chord's third (G#).

## WEEK TWO

Suspended chords can also be made from dominant sevenths—a sound heard in jazz compositions like Herbie Hancock's "Maiden Voyage." Take your D triad, for instance, add the flatted seventh degree (C) of the D major scale, and you've got a D dominant seventh

chord (D F# A C), labeled simply as D7. With the same method you used for creating sus4 triads, you can construct a D7sus4 chord (D G A C)—try the typical guitar fingering shown in **Example 4**. A reworking of Ex. 3 will give you the progression found in **Example 5**, using 7sus4s that resolve to dominant seventh chords.

Pay special attention to the E and A chord forms in these examples. All of these fingerings will work with barre chords, making them moveable and easy to transpose to any root. **Example 6** uses the E forms for a Bb7sus4-to-Bb7 move and the A forms for an Eb7sus4–Eb7 progression, all with a sixth-fret barre.

## WEEK THREE

You might recognize another suspended chord type—sus2—from popular music. The Police's "Message in a Bottle" is but one of many good examples of this chord in action. And you might already be using a sus2 when you add decorative hammer-ons and pull-offs to a D or A chord.

Just as in a sus4 chord, a sus2 replaces the third—this time, as the name indicates, with the second. Play a D major triad and let go of

your second finger, and you'll have a Dsus2 chord (**Example 7**). The note that you've taken away is F#; the note that you've replaced it with is E, or the open first string. It works just as easily for the A major chord when you lift your third finger, leaving the B string (the chord's second) open and taking away the C# (third). (Note that this is different from an add9 chord, which contains both the ninth/second and the third.)

Move the Asus2 form around the neck freely using a barre and finding the root on the fifth string. Need a C#sus2 chord? No problem—use a fourth-fret barre, as shown in **Example 8**. The Dsus2 form can be moved around as well, by making a half-barre with the root of the chord on the fourth string. Play it with your first finger at fret 2, and you've got the Esus2 shown in bar 2.

A Csus2 chord (**Example 9**) can be thought of as a basic open-C shape with the second finger omitted and the chord's second (D) played on the open fourth string. To avoid accidentally hitting the open first string (E), you can double the open G at the octave on string 1 with your fourth finger, as in bar 2.

## Beginners' Tip #2

Give yourself extra time to learn barre chords if they're new to you. The sweet spot for any fretted note is close behind the fret; aim for getting your first finger straight across all six strings in this location. For even pressure, practice rolling your first finger back so that you're using the side of the finger that is closest to your thumb.

## WEEK 3

Example 6

Example 6 shows a progression of four chords, each with a 6-fret barre:

- Bb7sus4**: Fretting 131411 (6 fr.)
- Bb7**: Fretting 131211 (6 fr.)
- Eb7sus4**: Fretting x13141 (6 fr.)
- Eb7**: Fretting x13141 (6 fr.)

The notation includes guitar chord diagrams and a six-string fretboard diagram with fingerings.

Example 7

Example 7 shows four chords:

- D**: Fretting xx0132
- Dsus2**: Fretting xx0230
- A**: Fretting x01230
- Asus2**: Fretting x01200

The notation includes guitar chord diagrams and a six-string fretboard diagram with fingerings.

Example 8

Example 8 shows two chords:

- C#sus2**: Fretting x13411 (4 fr.)
- Esus2**: Fretting xx1341

The notation includes guitar chord diagrams and a six-string fretboard diagram with fingerings.

**WEEK FOUR**

For extra color, try adding a ninth to any 7sus4 chord. For instance, barre the third fret with your first finger across strings 5–1 to get the C9sus4 (**Example 10**). This particular voicing, spelled lowest note to highest, is C (1) F (4) B $\flat$  ( $\flat$ 7) D (9). If you'd like, omit the chord's fifth, the third-fret G, as this note is inessential to the sonority.

Make an E9sus4 chord by playing a standard Bm7 barre chord at fret 2 and adding the low open E as the bass note. Notice that the ninth, F $\sharp$ , does double duty on strings 4 and 1. If you'd prefer to double the root (E) instead, lift your third finger to reveal the E on string 4, fret 2. **Example 11** shows both options.

A Gsus4 chord presents a problem that can be solved by blocking the fifth string, as notated in **Example 12**. If you want to play a G7sus4, fret the flatted seventh (F) on string 4 with your fourth finger and block the first string. One more step makes a jazzy-sounding G9sus4; just add your second finger to string 3, fret 2, giving you the ninth (A).

If you isolate the upper three notes of that G9sus4 chord, you'll discover an F major triad (F A C). So G9sus4 could also be called

F/G—an F triad with G in the bass. This formula gives you another moveable shape: any major triad played with a bass note that is a whole step higher than the root of the triad creates a 9sus4 chord.

To play **Example 13**, keep the same fingering and move the G9sus4 up to fourth position to make a B $\flat$ 9sus4 (A $\flat$ /B $\flat$ ) chord, then to seventh position for D $\flat$ 9sus4 (C $\flat$ /D $\flat$ ). Carefully block strings 5 and 1 and listen to the wide-open sound of these chords; there's no need to resolve them.

Finally, use your ears and taste to incorporate some suspended chords into your own playing, songwriting, and arranging for guitar. In

**Example 14**, you'll find a short piece, "Blue Suspenders," which demonstrates how you might integrate these harmonies with other chord types. As you get to know these fingerings, your ears will become accustomed to the sound of suspended chords and you'll find yourself working them into your playing naturally.

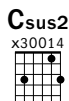
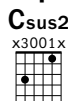
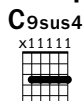
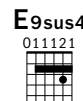
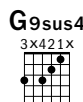
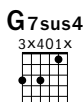
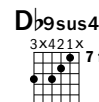
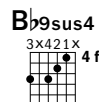
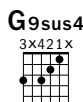
*Jane Miller, a professor of guitar at Berklee College of Music, has performed and presented master classes around the world. She is the author of Introduction to Jazz Guitar (Berklee Press/Hal Leonard, 2015). janemillergroup.com*

**Beginners' Tip #3**

A good rule of thumb for the sus2 barre chords shown—and for most chords, in fact—is this: skip a fret, skip a finger. So, skip your second finger and use your third and fourth fingers to play the chord forms when they begin two frets above the first-finger barre.

**Beginners' Tip #4**

You can get up and running pretty quickly with A9sus4 and D9sus4 chords by taking advantage of open strings that fit these chords. When you play the open strings 5–1—A, D, G, B, and E—you've got an A9sus4 chord. When you add the C on string 2, fret 1, and strum strings 4–1, you get D G C E, which is D9sus4 without the fifth (A).

**WEEK 4****Example 9****Example 10****Example 11**
**Example 12****Example 13**

Cont. on p. 54



Cont. from p. 53

### Example 14 "Blue Suspenders"

Chord diagrams and musical notation for "Blue Suspenders":

Chords: A9sus4 (3x421x), Dsus4 (xx0134), D (xx0132), A7sus4 (x02040), Gsus4 (3x001x), G (3x000x), F7sus4 (131411).

Chords: E9sus4 (013121), Cadd9 (x21034), G (320004), C9sus4 (x11111), Fmaj7 (xx3210), E7sus4 (020300), Asus2 (x02300).

The musical notation consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff shows the melody with various chords and fingerings. The bass staff shows the bass line with fingerings. The chords are indicated by the chord diagrams above the staff.

### TAKE IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Once you've completed this lesson, try resolving 9sus4 chords, just like you did with triads. You might take it even further and flatten the ninth, creating a more urgent need for resolution. For example, play A9sus4, turn it into A7 $\flat$ 9, and resolve it to either a D major- or D minor-type chord. The voicings in this example are all moveable and therefore easily transposed. Call any dominant chord V and count down to I to land on the home chord.

Chord diagrams and musical notation for "Take It to the Next Level":

Chords: A9sus4 (x0421x), A7 $\flat$ 9 (x0421x 2 fr.), Dmaj7 (x4311x), A9sus4 (x0421x), A7 $\flat$ 9 (x0421x 2 fr.), Dm9 (x2134x).

The musical notation consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff shows the melody with various chords and fingerings. The bass staff shows the bass line with fingerings. The chords are indicated by the chord diagrams above the staff.



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Willie Nelson

# Whiskey River

Picking apart a country classic, Willie Nelson style

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

For decades, Willie Nelson has played Johnny Bush's "Whiskey River" as a set opener, and he has even been known to perform this downhearted drinking song several times in the same concert. Do a YouTube search for live versions and you'll find that, testament to his gifts as a song interpreter, he has discovered many new wrinkles in the tune.

The arrangement here is based on Nelson's recording of "Whiskey River" from his 1973 album, *Shotgun Willie*. The song has a fairly simple structure, with two main repeating sections, a chorus and a verse, and instru-

mental solos played over the chorus progression. A change in rhythmic feel between the chorus and verse helps keep things interesting: the former section is in a moderately slow 4/4, while the latter, in cut time, feels twice as fast.

For the chorus, a 16th-note-based strumming pattern like the one shown here works well. In the last bar of that section, try a stop-time move: strum a G chord on beat 1, and don't play anything else for the rest of the measure. Also, feel free to swap out any of the triads for their dominant-seventh counterparts (i.e., C7 in the place of C, etc.).

For the verse, try a basic boom-chuck pattern, with bass notes on beats 1 and 3 and upper-string strums on 2 and 4. If you'd like, throw in a walkup between chords, like the A-to-B-to-C line in the notation.

The guitar solo shows a bluesy side of Nelson. It might look tricky on paper, but it's based mainly on notes that fall within the G minor pentatonic scale (G B $\flat$  C D F), which can be played entirely in third position using your first, third, and fourth fingers on the notes on frets 3, 5, and 6, respectively. This scale can serve as a gateway to improvisation on guitar, so here's a good opportunity to come up with your own solo. **AC**

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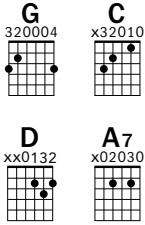
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## Chorus Pattern

## Verse Pattern

### Chords



Chorus Pattern: Treble clef, 4/4 time. Chords: C, G, C. Bass clef, 4/4 time. Fingering: 0, 1, 2, 3. \* = down; V = up.

Verse Pattern: Treble clef, 4/4 time. Chords: G, C. Bass clef, 4/4 time. Fingering: 0, 1, 2, 3. etc.

## Guitar Solo

Guitar Solo: Treble clef, 4/4 time. Chords: G, C, D. Bass clef, 4/4 time. Fingering: 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9. bend strings sim. throughout.

## Chorus

\*G C  
Whiskey River take my mind

G  
Don't let her memory torture me

D  
Whiskey River don't run dry

G  
You're all I've got take care of me

Repeat Chorus

## Verse

G C  
I'm drowning in a whiskey river

G  
Bathing my mem'ried mind

A7 D  
In the wetness of its soul

G  
Feeling the amber current

C  
Flowing from my mind

D G  
And leaving a heart you left so cold

## Repeat Chorus

Guitar Solo

Repeat Verse

Repeat Chorus

Pedal Steel Solo

Repeat Chorus and fade

\*First time, no chord.



Mississippi John Hurt

# Coffee Blues

Here's how to play a Mississippi John Hurt classic

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

One of Mississippi John Hurt's signature songs, "Coffee Blues," contains the innuendo-rich lyric "lovin' spoonful," which inspired the name of the American rock band. The tune also serves as an excellent introduction to the eight-bar blues, a truncated variation of the more common 12-bar form.

Mississippi John Hurt played the song in A major (though he sometimes tuned down the guitar, as he did in a 1963 recording by Tom Hoskins on the Rounder label). In A, the eight-bar form goes like this: D7 (IV), A7 (I), E7 (V), and A7 (I), two measures per chord.

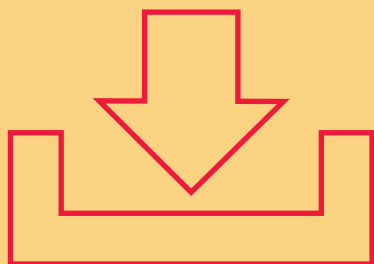
Throughout "Coffee Blues," Mississippi John Hurt plays variations on the eight-bar

pattern shown here in notation, meaning that once you can play it you've essentially learned the entire song. The music should be straightforward enough: pick the down-stemmed notes with your thumb or thumbpick and the up-stemmed ones with your other fingers (or fingerpicks). Hybrid picking—a flatpick and fingers—could work as well. Whichever approach you choose, make sure to play with a driving quarter-note feel on the bass notes.

As for the fretting hand, to help get Hurt's relaxed feel, remember to hold down each chord shape for as long as possible. A couple of fingering suggestions: At the beginning of

measure 2 (the first measure of the eight-bar form), fret an open-D-chord shape at fret 1, pick the first-fret F, then slide the whole shape up one fret; in the following measure, hammer on and pull off the second-fret F# with your second finger while your other fingers remain in place on the D chord.

Be sure to listen to Mississippi John Hurt's various recordings of "Coffee Blues" to witness the humor of his delivery and the elasticity of his vocal phrasing, not to mention the range of little variations he plays on the basic accompaniment pattern—it's details like this that made him such a compelling musician. **AC**



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## Main Accompaniment Pattern

The main accompaniment pattern is written for guitar in 4/4 time, key of D major. It consists of three systems of music, each with a treble and bass staff. The first system is labeled with chords D and A. The second system is labeled with chords A7, E, E7, and A. The third system is labeled with chords A7, A, D/F#, Dm/F, and A. The pattern includes various fret numbers and fingerings indicated by numbers 0-5 and 1-5 on the strings.

\* Starts on bar 7 of the 8-bar form

1. This is the "Coffee Blues"  
I likes a certain brand, Maxwell's House
  2. It's good till the last drop, just like it says on the can  
I used to have a girl cookin' a good Maxwell's House  
She moved away
  3. Some said to Memphis and some said to Leland  
But I found her, and I wanted her to cook me  
Some good Maxwell's House
  4. Understand if I can get just a spoonful of Maxwell's House  
Do me much good as two or three cups of this other coffee
  5. I've got to go to Memphis from there to Leland  
I wanna see my baby 'bout a lovin' spoon
  6. About a lovin' spoonful  
Well, I'm just got to have my lovin'  
I found her
  7. Good mornin', baby, how you do this mornin'?  
Well, please, ma'am, just a lovin' spoon
  8. Just a lovin' spoonful  
I declare I got to have my one lovin' spoon
  9. My baby packed her suitcase and she went away  
I couldn't let her stay for my lovin'
  10. My lovin' spoonful  
Well, I've just got to have my lovin'
  11. Good mornin', baby, how you do this mornin'?  
Well, please, ma'am, just a lovin' spoon
  12. Just a lovin' spoonful  
Well I've just got to have my lovin'
  13. Oh the preacher in the pulpit jumpin' up and down  
He laid his Bible down for his lovin'  
Ain't Maxwell House all right?
  14. Well I've just got to have my lovin'
  15. You can bring me whiskey, you can bring me tea  
Nothin' satisfies me, man, but my lovin' spoon
  16. My lovin'  
Well I've just got to have my lovin'
- etc.





Ed Haley

# Man of Constant Sorrow

Fiddling around with a great song from the American folk canon

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

All steel-string guitarists should have at least one fiddle tune in their repertoire, so if you happen to be lacking one, then learning “Man of Constant Sorrow” is a good place to start.

The arrangement here is straightforward, and is appropriate for players of all levels. It's based not on the Stanley Brothers' famous bluegrass version of this traditional American folk song, but on Kentuckian fiddler Ed Haley's instrumental interpretation. Haley, who died in 1951, never recorded in a professional context, but home recordings his son

made in the mid-1940s give a sense of his musical greatness.

As its title suggests, “Man of Constant Sorrow” is a lugubrious number—the first lyrics are, “I am a man of constant sorrow; I've seen trouble all my days”—so keep that in mind when working through the tune. This arrangement is situated mostly in open position; where possible, let the open strings ring into the fretted notes, for a rich sound. Also, be sure to observe the legato slides, from D to E on string 2, which are important, as they lend a vocal quality to the melody. Play these slides with your third finger.

In terms of accompaniment, the arrangement will work well with the boom-chuck approach, as bass runs could conflict with the melody here. As shown in the notation that precedes the tune, keep things simple: play roots and fifths on the odd beats and chordal accents on the evens, all in downstrokes. Continue the pattern using basic open chords—or re-harmonize it to your liking.

*This arrangement originally appeared in Fiddle Tunes and Folk Songs: Complete Edition, available at [store.acousticguitar.com](http://store.acousticguitar.com).*

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## Accompaniment Pattern

Am G

0 0 1 2 0 3 3 0 3

## Verse

Am G

3/5 0 3 0 2 1 0 2 0 0 3 0 3 0 3

E7 Am

1. 2.

0 3 0 2 0 2 3/5 0 3 0 3 0 2

## Bridge

D G

5 5 2 0 3 0 3 3 0 2

D E7

5 5 2 0 3/5 0 3/5 0 3 0

Cont. on p. 62

## MAN OF CONSTANT SORROW

Cont. from p. 61

**Verse**

18 **Am** **G**

22 **E7** **Am**

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Matt Eich

## MAKERS & SHAKERS

COURTESY OF MATT EICH

# Matt Eich of Mule Resophonic Guitars

Bring your enthusiasm, he'll take care of the details

BY E.E. BRADMAN

**"I**'m reading this book, *Principles: Life and Work*, by Ray Dalio, which is awesome, just fantastic," Matt Eich says. "One of the things he asks is, 'What do you want, what is the reality, and what are you going to do about it?' If you can answer those questions, you're on the right track. But if you don't actually figure out what you want, and you don't know what the reality is, you could really be wasting your time."

Eich certainly knows about time spent in limbo, but he also knows about changing his reality and going for the gold. In the six years he and his team (his brother Phil Eich, their friend Adam Smith, and recent hire Will Shea) have been building instruments in Saginaw, Michigan, under the Mule Resophonic Guitars name, Eich's steel- and brass-bodied resonator guitars have become known for their full-bodied and complex tone, impressive volume, natural reverb, gorgeous vintage looks, and easy playability. Mule's popularity has led to a 14-month wait time with a wait list close to 120

names long. But Eich's journey getting to this point has been anything but straightforward.

After making a couple guitars in high school and learning the basics at Roberto-Venn School of Luthiery in Phoenix, Arizona, Eich spent three years in Virginia working for acclaimed guitar and banjo makers Huss & Dalton, where carving necks, binding bodies, and doing millwork on hundreds of instruments gave him the confidence to think of himself as a pro. ("I needed to carve 400 necks to feel like I knew what I was doing," he says.) Eich subsequently worked in manufacturing and built guitars on the side, but when he lost his Chicago factory job in 2010, he returned to central Michigan. Seeing Kelly Joe Phelps play a resonator guitar at a show in Traverse City, three hours from Saginaw, was just the inspiration he needed. Initially based in a small garage closet, Mule opened for business in 2012.

"I made four the first year, ran out of money, and spent some time at a temp job," says Eich. "Two weeks later, I had 12 orders,

and a month later, I had 25. A year later, I had 60 on the wait list, then 80."

These days, the Mule team builds about 120 instruments a year in a 1,600-square-foot shop they've enjoyed since 2016, and the list of high-profile players who swear by their Mules includes Charlie Parr, Jeffrey Foucault, Charlie Hicks, Joey Landreth, Dan Auerbach, and of course, Phelps. When he looks back on the years he spent in factories wondering how he'd ever make guitars for a living, Eich laughs. "I was standing in coolant puddles in the middle of the night, sticking my arms into ovens, rubber presses—industrial supply stuff. I mean, it was a haul," he says, sighing. "Now I can walk into a shop with a high ceiling, the tools are there, I put on a podcast, and carve a neck. It's gravy. I'll take these troubles any day."

**What niche did you want to fill when you started Mule?**

I wanted to make a resonator guitar that was closer to an acoustic instrument, with tradi-

tional resonators that sounded and looked different, and were warmer. No one was offering that sound.

#### **How do you get the sound you were aiming for?**

By treating the back more like an acoustic guitar. To get a warmer sound, you need more low end—low-end waves are large, and to get large waves, you need a large thing moving. Traditionally, builders want the cones to do most of the vibrating, but I wanted to get the back vibrating, because that's a large piece. If there was going to be more warmth, it couldn't come from the small cones—it had to come from the back. I brace the inside differently so that I don't have to put the dowels in between the back and the soundwell. I let the back do the warm, low stuff, and I let the cones do the high stuff.

#### **What do you love about the tone of a steel-bodied resonator?**

The warmth, the reverb, the sustain, the clarity—a steel resonator ends up kind of being like a complex coffee. It's steel, but it's also warm and it's clear, plus it has reverb. That constant juxtaposition of sounds is what makes it intriguing.

#### **Your tricones look like single-cones.**

I like the traditional look of the f-hole with the single-cone coverplate, so I wanted to put three cones in a body instead of having the grates that you normally see on a tricone. Turns out that the first prototype National was a single-cone coverplate with three cones inside, but it didn't go into production. They started making tricones, and then single-cones came later.

#### **How much difference does the soundhole make?**

They have a huge impact on the sound. If you play a National Reso Rocket, which is a single-cone with a tricone soundhole, it sounds more like a tricone. And holes in a tricone body make it sound more like a single-cone than you'd expect; it's a little sweeter on the high end, it has a bit more compression, and it's just a little bit more balanced.

#### **How do you help customers choose between a single-cone and a tricone?**

If someone strums with a pick, I recommend a single-cone; you get more headroom, and it's a little bit warmer on the lower end. But eight out of ten people we make guitars for are going to play slide and fingerstyle, and sometimes use a pick. If that's you, get a tricone, because it's a little bit sweeter, the compression is balanced, and it serves both purposes pretty well.

#### **When do you recommend a pickup?**

If they don't have an amp, I don't recommend a pickup. We make a Mule humbucker and a P-90-style pickup we call a Wee-90. A pickup on a resonator sounds cool because it's amplifying vibrations of a big steel body, but if you're looking for the most accurate representation of your resonator guitar, put a mic in front of the instrument so you can get all the sonic information from the strings, the body, the cones, and the surface. It needs to have all that.

#### **Your option list is surprisingly simple.**

I've never had any specs on my website: No nut width, scale length, brand of tuners, cone type, or brand of steel—just roasted maple for the necks. We've sold 550 instruments and no one ever asked. It's either steel or brass, there's a pickup or there isn't, and it's a tricone or a single-cone. When people get into specs, they start thinking that maybe one small detail will make them happier and inspire them more than another. The customers bring their enthusiasm and I think about the details.

#### **What do you think customers are looking for?**

They're buying a connection to you as a person, and they're buying an instrument that, hopefully, inspires them to write songs they wouldn't have written and meet people they wouldn't have met. I'm trying to offer people a tool and get out of the way.

#### **How do you do that?**

By making something transparent enough that everybody can just get on with playing. My instruments are the traditional resonator shape because it's been around nearly a hundred years; that's what people expect. I get a lot of compliments on my neck shape, and the reason why people like it is because it's a subtle blend of "C," "D," and "V" shapes. That's part of that transparency.

#### **Now you offer titanium-reinforced necks, too.**

Titanium is super cool. It's so light, and it wants to return to the shape that it was formed in. Unlike steel and aluminum, titanium doesn't bend; it's light and strong, and it's actively trying to keep the neck in the original shape. It's great with a torrefied maple neck that's resistant to humidity.

#### **What excites you about making these instruments?**

The possibility that a player will find the sound completely different from anything that they've ever played. I hope they'll play things they haven't played before because it sounds different on this guitar, and that when they go back to

their dreadnought, they'll approach it in a different way. That's what's inspiring. I want to get a guitar to someone and hear them go, "Wow! This is like nothing I've ever heard." I want that emotional reaction.

#### **What would you tell somebody who's trying to get into the guitar-building business right now?**

First, as Bob Taylor says in *Guitar Lessons: A Life's Journey Turning Passion into Business*, quantity is just as important as quality. If you're a new builder, don't make three instruments a year and then try to sell them for \$8,000 apiece. Carve and fret hundreds of necks and make lots of bodies to learn what you suck at. Make a ton of stuff, because some guy out there is making the same thing you are, and he has already carved 500 necks. That's your competition, and you have to be real about it. Otherwise, it's a hard road. Navigating the balance between "how do I make this awesome" and "how do I make more of that" is an ongoing thing.

Second, serve people by giving them something that fixes a problem. They're looking for a particular sound—get it to them. When people first get into building guitars, they think, "Well, I want to make this new body shape, and everyone will love it." If you do that, you're not filling a need—you're doing it for yourself. That's a huge mistake.

#### **Seems that you love the social aspect, too.**

I was telling someone yesterday that this whole "making things" thing is like our little community softball league. You don't join softball because you like softball—you join softball so you can meet other people who like being outside and are looking for friends, right? In a time of social media and lack of real connections, it's extremely rewarding, but you have to have an open mind.

#### **Your journey is a great case study for up-and-coming luthiers.**

I'm passionate about telling people my story, because when I wanted to do this on my own, I was pretty lost. Jeff Huss and Mark Dalton are spectacular human beings, and working with them showed me what it would take to succeed. But I spent over a decade in factories wondering how the heck I was going to make it happen. I want to share the little bit that I've learned so far.

#### **What's next for Mule?**

I'm going to start making some wood-body resonators, a super-limited thing so I can get my toe back in the water. I want to treat wood-body resonators like acoustic guitars and put the huge knowledge base about acoustic instruments into a resonator guitar. I want to see what I can do with that.

AC



# The Importance of a Strong Bridge Glue Joint

Don't rely on the bolts in a Gibson bridge to do the work

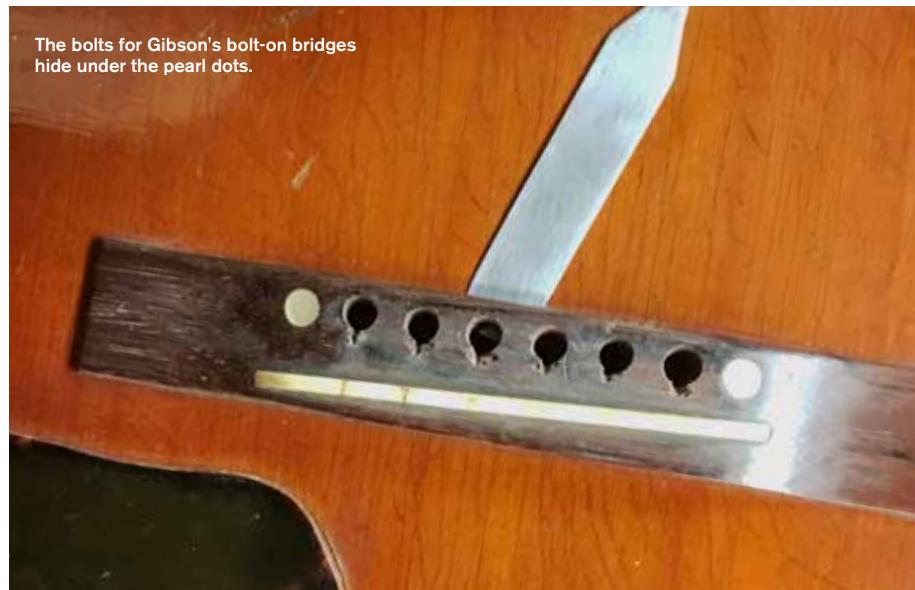
BY MAMIE MINCH

**Q:** I play a Gibson LG-0 that my mother handed down to me—she got it as a teenager in the '60s. It's a great guitar and in pretty killer shape considering all it's seen. A few months ago, I noticed that the bridge was pulling up. (I can get a piece of paper under the back of it.) I read online that you don't have to worry about the bridge coming up on an older Gibson, because they have two bolts holding down the bridge, hidden under the pearl dots. I keep it humidified, and I don't think it's had much work in its lifetime. Can I just live with it as is?

—Rick, Long Island, New York

**A:** Gentle readers, we live in an exciting time, don't we? All of the information a person could want in the world is a few keystrokes away—free, accessible, and often not thoughtfully written. Older Gibsons are great guitars and it's no wonder that people like to obsess and chat about them endlessly, but from where I'm standing, leaving these two familiar bolts to do the whole job is a bad idea. The reasons a guitar needs a good, strong glue-joint between the bridge and the top are pretty compelling.

First, let's talk about sound. A properly glued bridge is a solid way to transfer vibration from the strings to the soundboard—all the down-bearing pressure on those strings over the saddle will transmit vibration through the bridge and glue joint to the box of your guitar. If the bridge just sat against the top of the guitar without really being joined to it, you would lose the vibration's



The bolts for Gibson's bolt-on bridges hide under the pearl dots.

energy before it had a chance to resonate the box. It bears saying that hide glue, which is crystalline in structure and very hard when dry, is a great glue to use on a bridge joint. It's generally better than a softer glue like Titebond, which can absorb vibration. The hide glue, being harder, creates a very efficient glue joint that conducts the vibration where you want it to go.

The other reason it's important to have a strong glue joint under a bridge is structural. Spreading the stress of the string tension over a larger area, an area the size of the bridge's full footprint, is the safest way to do it. In fact, a bridge glue joint that has come halfway unglued can sometimes yank at the top in a scary or asymmetrical way. This can contribute to a "belly" below a bridge, and a matching dip in front of that bridge.

Let's think about our writer's Gibson for a moment. Those two bolts were used on most of Gibson's flattop guitars to (they said) guide the placement of the bridge. Under the bridge plate, on each side, is a little locking washer and a 1/4-inch nut, and the bridge joint was made with hide glue. Over time, the glue has given up, leaving those bolts to do all of the work of holding the bridge down. If you haven't started to see this yet, you may soon: Often, the top will split right in line

with where the bolts are and you'll get two cracks running from the bridge to the bottom of the guitar. That's a pretty good reason to go for a bridge re-glue!

The basic preparation for this job is to first make sure the glue joint is released. Then we'd use heat to float the pearl dots up and out of the bridge. From there, we simply unscrew the bolts from the top and the nuts, and voila, ready for fresh glue.

Sometimes, what's under a bridge will surprise us in the shop. Every once in a while there will be finish some of the way, or even all of the way, under a bridge. Of course, glue doesn't really stick to finish, so we can see that the bridge was never really glued down. In this case, we carefully scrape the finish away to create a clean joint of wood-to-wood, and the sound is always much improved. We also sometimes see the mistakes made by those who were there before us. Removing a bridge can be tricky for the uninitiated, but people sometimes give it a try anyway. That's when we get a guitar with a headache hidden under its bridge joint in the way of a big hole!

But that's a repair for another time.

Mamie Minch is the co-owner of Brooklyn Lutherie and an active blues performer. [brooklynlutherie.com](http://brooklynlutherie.com)



Mamie Minch

## GOT A QUESTION?

Uncertain about guitar care and maintenance? The ins-and-outs of guitar building? Or a topic related to your gear? Ask *Acoustic Guitar's* resident repair expert Mamie Minch. Send an email titled "Repair Expert" to Senior Editor Greg Olwell at [greg.olwell@stringletter.com](mailto:greg.olwell@stringletter.com), and he'll forward it to Mamie.



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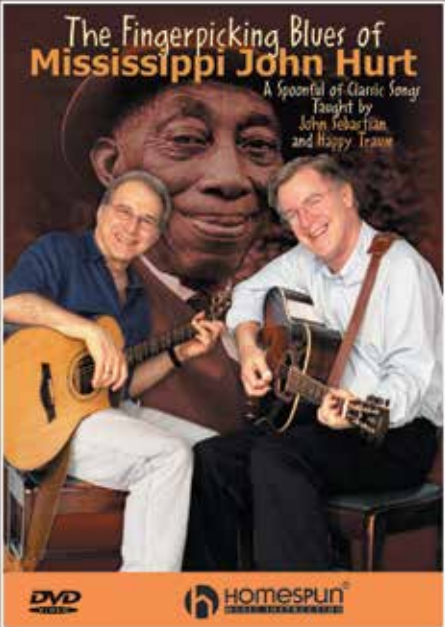


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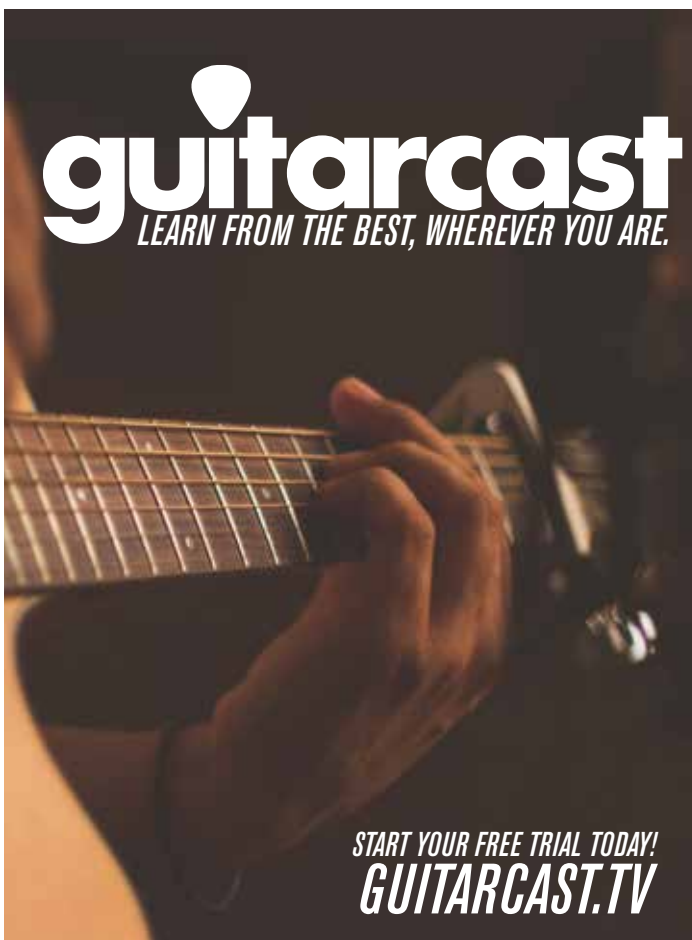
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# Pre-War Guitars Model-HD

**Hate distressed guitars or not, Pre-War creates genuine magic**

**BY PETE MADSEN**

The old saying “You can’t judge a book by its cover” may be overused, but it’s a good analogy when it comes to distressed guitars, like the Pre-War Guitars Model-HD seen here. Some folks will be turned off by distressing or antiquing—the process of making a new instrument look much older than it is. Why and who would do such a thing to a new, and in this case expensive, guitar and risk being labeled a poseur?

I’ve had these thoughts, too. But what if you didn’t know the instrument was a “fake,” and just heard the sounds it made when played by a talented player? How would you judge it then? What if Molly Tuttle, Tommy Emmanuel, and Eli West were seen and heard playing distressed guitars? Would we call them poseurs?

All of these master musicians have played instruments from Pre-War Guitars, a small North Carolina shop offering acoustic guitars made to look, sound, and feel like flattops of the 1930s and 1940s. These are not just big names, but players who care deeply about sound and feel. Tuttle is quoted on the company’s website, enthusing, “This is the best new guitar I have ever played,” as is Emmanuel, who raves, “You have exceeded my expectations . . . and they were high.” I don’t think either player is worried about being labeled a poseur.

## WHO IS PRE-WAR?

Wes Lambe and Ben Maschal started Pre-War Guitars in 2014, after decades of repairing and researching both old and new guitars. Lambe was known for building seven- and eight-string fanned-fret guitars for clients including David Crosby, Charlie Hunter, Pat Metheny, and Nels Cline. After becoming obsessed with acoustic instruments as a teenager, Maschal graduated from the Roberto-Venn School of Luthiery in 2001, then went to work building and repairing guitars in his garage. He later gained a reputation for his vintage-instrument expertise during his time working for mandolin guru Tony Williamson. Lambe and Maschal connected through a deep passion for prewar instruments, and so they began their company to make new interpretations of the play-worn guitars they







loved, with a few slight updates to help the instruments live long, healthy lives.

### FIRST IMPRESSION

Pre-War sent a model HD (herringbone dreadnought) to AG, and I knew something was up when I saw the Harptone hardshell case. Established in 1886, Harptone made the cobble-grained cases often found with vintage guitars from Martin, Gibson, Guild, and others. My editor, Greg Olwell, told me nothing about the guitar, so as he opened the case, I thought I was looking at an authentic prewar Martin. The wear marks from many years of picking had a natural arc that you would expect from a player's picking hand. The checking of the nitrocellulose finish seemed to have resulted from a long, slow process.

It wasn't until I looked at the back of the guitar that things seemed a little askew. There were a couple of small dings in the back, but no real belt rash or other signs of age. The lightly finished neck was smooth as butter and the ebony fretboard had no pits or wear.

One key difference that breaks from Pre-War's vintage replica concept is the addition of an adjustable truss rod. Martin, whose D-28 clearly serves as this guitar's model, wouldn't feature a truss rod on its guitars until 1985, and few would argue that an adjustable truss rod isn't a massive improvement over previous designs that used an ebony rod (introduced mid-1920s), a T-bar (late-1934), or square-shaped steel tube (1967).

### SOUND

I dove in with some single-string lines and basic cowboy chords, and noticed immediately that the HD has a pronounced growl, with a midrange crunchiness complemented by a deep bass that's clear and never boomy. I play mostly fingerpicked blues on smaller-bodied guitars, but I instantly fell in love with the deep, rich tone of this Brazilian rosewood guitar. The mids and deep bass do not take anything away from the sparkle of the treble, which shines through so clearly.

I played some bluegrass runs, as well as Hank Garland's "Sugarfoot Rag," and was impressed with the overall balance between treble and bass—each note sounded precise, even, and bold. The neck's light finish makes it smooth and easy to navigate. Pre-War calls its profile a 1937 C-to-V shape. What starts as a C shape at the nut transitions to a soft V around the sixth fret, becoming more pronounced towards the 12th fret. This transition feels subtle to my hand. Also, I found that the 1-3/4-inch nut and 2-5/16-inch string-spacing at the bridge gave ample room for fingerstyle excursions, such as John Fahey's "Last Steam Engine Train."

## The lightly finished neck was smooth as butter and the ebony fretboard had no pits or wear.

Even more of the HD's lush bass tones were brought out in open-D tuning (D A D F# A D). I wore a slide, using Tampa Red's "Boogie Woogie Dance" as a springboard for some bottleneck fun. An alternating bass played between strings 6 and 4 on the HD sounded like a train chugging down the tracks.

When I realized the guitar I was playing was new, I had the same the knee-jerk reaction I assume many of AG readers will also have: this has been faked! But it sounded so good and played so well, I wondered how much distressing has to do with it. Would this guitar sound just as good without the faux playwear?

Lambe claims that in addition to using a very thin layer of nitrocellulose lacquer, that the finish checking—the process by which fine cracks form on the surface of the lacquer as the guitar ages—opens the guitar up for increased tonal projection. Also, the simulated pick wear does a similar job by scraping off more of the finish. Okay, I'll buy that. Without an identical guitar that has not been distressed it would be hard to qualify the differences. I have to rely on my subjective instincts and the grin on my face as I dig into a few more licks.

### WHICH LEVEL IS RIGHT FOR YOU?

Pre-War offers four levels of distressing. Level 1, New Old Stock, replicates the look and feel of an old guitar that has spent most of its life in a case. The finish is checked but has no added play wear. With Level 2, Well Loved, Well Played, the checked finish shows some sign of pick and elbow wear on the soundboard. Our test guitar was antiqued to Level 3, The Road Warrior, meant to approximate a guitar that has spent 60 years on the road, with more wear near the soundhole and generally on the top of the guitar. Level 4 takes it even further—not quite as worn as "Trigger," Willie Nelson's famously worn nylon-string companion, but with considerable wear over the top.

### MARKETING?

Lambe told me about an experiment he did with his distressed guitars. He would place them in stores next to new guitars and watch to see which instruments customers would play. More often than not they were drawn to the aged-looking guitar: the Pre-War. That makes sense, as there is a certain mojo to an old instrument, a vibe that it has been down the road and seen some things.

However, would there not be an equal reaction of revulsion when the player finds out the guitar she is playing is a fake? Maybe, but if you are playing one of these Pre-War guitars by then it's too late: You're probably hooked. The \$8,295 price may seem steep, but this is the Brazilian rosewood version of the guitar. Pre-War also offers the Model D, with mahogany back and sides, for \$4,995, right in the ballpark for a boutique guitar made in a small shop. Also available is the International HD (\$5,495), which uses granadillo in place of Brazilian rosewood.

There are guitars we play and love, even though they may not have everything we want, and then there are guitars that provide a benchmark for how good a guitar can sound. I have played a few Martins from the 1930s, and I own a 1933 Martin 0-18. My main observation of these old guitars is that they sound complete. There is nothing I would change. I feel the same way about this Pre-War.

I have come across a few distressed guitars that didn't pass the muster. When one detail is wrong, it can throw the whole vibe off. If you are going the commit to the process of distressing you have to do it right. Pre-War did it right. **AG**

## PRE-WAR GUITARS MODEL-HD

**BODY** Torrefied Adirondack spruce top with torrefied spruce bracing; CITES Brazilian rosewood back and sides; herringbone binding; ebony bridge with bone nut and unslotted bone bridge pins; distressed nitrocellulose finish

**NECK** 25.4"-scale Honduran mahogany with 1937 C-to-V shape; ebony fretboard with abalone diamonds and squares long pattern position inlays; 1-3/4"-wide bone nut; 2-5/16" string spacing at bridge; Brazilian rosewood headplate; Gotoh tuners

**OTHER** Harptone hardshell case; D'Addario EJ17 phosphor bronze medium-gauge strings (.013-.056); available left-handed; shade-top finish; limited lifetime warranty

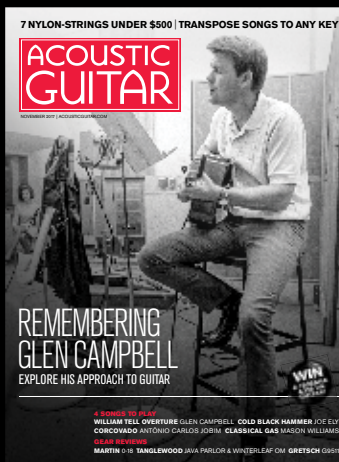
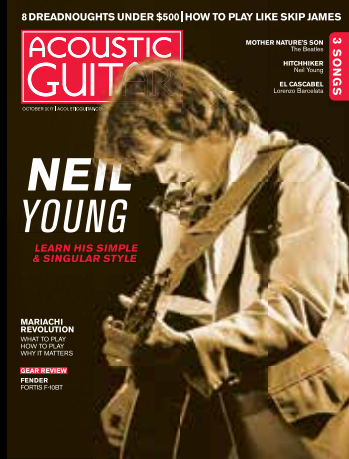
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# Yamaha CSF3M and FG-TA

Yamaha updates an old favorite and adds its TransAcoustic system to lower-priced guitars

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

About 15 years ago, Yamaha mothballed its CSF line of compact and modest steel-strings, pitched at the student or casual folk musician. But now the CSF series is back, adding constructional upgrades but maintaining good value. The new, all-solid-wood CSF3M boasts scalloped bracing for enhanced tone, projection, and loudness.

At the same time, the always-diverse Yamaha has been spreading its TransAcoustic electronic technology from higher-end guitars, like the LL we reviewed in 2016, to less expensive guitars, including the dreadnought-sized FG-TA, which has also received scalloped bracing.

While having entirely different characters, both the CSF3M and FG-TA show that Yamaha is helping to remove the stigma of the budget acoustic guitar with instruments that are thoughtfully designed and well built—and fun to play.

## YAMAHA CSF3M

I personally gravitate toward the CSF3M. Weighing under four pounds, it's a bit lighter than the FG-TA and, though slightly less expensive, it has solid mahogany back and sides, paired with a Sitka spruce top. (Yamaha also offers a similar guitar with laminated back and sides—the CSF1M model—for \$399.) And while a case is optional for the FG-TA, the CSF3M includes a hard gig bag.

It's a nice-looking instrument. Our review model sports a rich, dark, sunburst finish on the top; simple but classy ornamentation, such as a rosette that incorporates a single pearl ring; and wooden body binding and heel cap. An asymmetric bridge lends a nice modern flourish to an otherwise traditional design.

Having a lower bout of around 13-1/2 inches, the CSF3M is close in size to a typical

single-0. The guitar has a short-scale neck—23.5 inches, compared to 24.9 on a standard 000-style guitar or 25.4 on an OM or dreadnought. This might deter players accustomed to the feel and sound of longer-scale guitars, but the closer confines, along with a subtle V-neck profile and low action, make the guitar super easy to play—and difficult to put down.

The guitar works quite well for old-timey fingerpicking, as I discovered when preparing the notation for Mississippi John Hurt's "Coffee Blues" in this issue. The sound was clear and dry, heavy on fundamentals, with a punchiness and responsiveness that more than made up for a lack of sustain.

The CSF3M's dryness was an asset when it came to strumming. Whether I played open cowboy chords or jazzy drop-2 voicings, the sound was nicely uncluttered, good for



**YAMAHA CSF3M**

**BODY** 14-fret parlor; solid Sitka spruce top with scalloped X-bracing; solid mahogany back and sides; rosewood bridge with 11 mm string-spacing and black ABS bridge pins; gloss tobacco brown sunburst finish

**NECK** 23.5"-scale nato neck; rosewood fretboard; 1-11/16" urea nut; die-cast chrome tuners; satin finish

**EXTRAS** SRT Zero-Impact piezo pickup; Elixir Nanoweb 80/20 Bronze Light strings (.012–.053); hard gig bag; vintage natural finish available

**PRICE** \$880 (MSRP); \$549.99 (MAP)

**MADE IN** China





accompanying a singer or tracking with other instruments in the recording studio.

Included in the package is what Yamaha calls its passive “zero-impact” pickup, designed not to interfere with the guitar’s natural woody look (as built-in preamps often do) or excessively color its sound. The pickup includes an individual piezo element for each string. I plugged the guitar into a Fender Acoustasonic amplifier and found that it delivers a natural representation of the guitar’s acoustic sound and is free from unwanted noise.

### YAMAHA FG-TA

I first tried Yamaha’s uncanny TransAcoustic system—a preamp with built-in reverb and chorus effects, which can be engaged even when the guitar is not plugged in to an amp—when I reviewed the LL-TA [December 2016]. That guitar, with its solid rosewood back and sides, costs around a grand, but Yamaha has since extended the TransAcoustic to more affordable models like the FG-TA and its concert-sized companion, the FS-TA.

Like all of the recent Yamaha guitars I’ve auditioned, the well-built FG-TA is handsome and, most important, a pleasure to play. With

its slim, C-shaped neck, relatively narrow nut (1.6875 inches), and longer scale-length (25.5 inches), it boasts a playability just as good as that of the CSF3M. But, at more than five pounds, the FG-TA feels body-heavy, presumably owing to the electronics assembly inside the guitar.

When played unplugged, without the effects engaged, the FG-TA sounded pretty good. It probably comes as no surprise that a guitar at this price doesn’t have the exciting bass and overall presence and drive of a fine all-solid dreadnought. The TransAcoustic electronics are the major selling point on this guitar. Still, it had good acoustic balance between registers, and notes sounded true and clear in all regions of the neck. The guitar responded equally well to fingerpicking and flatpicking, in standard and open tunings.

As on other TA-equipped Yamahas, the FG-TA’s built-in modulation effects are useable without any external amplification. This unique onboard system is powered by two AA batteries and is adjustable via knobs on the upper bass bout. (For more on how this works, see the videos on AcousticGuitar.com.) The

reverb and chorus can be used individually or together, and offer nice color and shimmer to arpeggiated passages and single-note lines alike. With the LL-TA, I noticed an unwanted feedback-like sound when the effects were on and I played a low B $\flat$ , but I experienced nothing like this on the FG-TA.

Using the chorus on its own, I dialed in a pretty convincing 12-string effect that sounded great for a tune like Pink Floyd’s “Wish You Were Here.” The reverb was surprisingly natural-sounding and, when used judiciously, it added an attractive shimmer to arpeggiated passages and lead lines. Also, the handful of people I played the guitar for were quite mesmerized by the unexpected sounds emanating from it.

Like the CSF3M, the FG-TA is equipped with a piezo pickup system and sounds quite natural when played through an amp. With the reverb and chorus conveyed through the amp, the FG-TA edges out its counterpart in terms of versatility as an acoustic-electric. Still, judging from the design and execution of both instruments—and, more important, their playability and sound—it seems that Yamaha is making some of its best budget guitars to date. **AC**



TransAcoustic actuator

### YAMAHA FG-TA

**BODY** 14-fret dreadnought; solid Sitka spruce top with scalloped X-bracing; laminated mahogany back and sides; rosewood bridge with 11 mm string spacing and black ABS bridge pins; vintage tint finish

**NECK** 25.6"-scale nato neck; bound rosewood fretboard; 1-11/16" urea nut; die-cast chrome tuners; satin finish

**EXTRAS** System 70 TransAcoustic preamp with SRT piezo pickup; Elixir Nanoweb 80/20 Bronze Light strings (.012–.053); optional hardshell case; brown sunburst or black finishes available

**PRICE** \$939 (MSRP); \$599.99 (MAP)

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# Fishman Loudbox Mini Charge

A small, battery-powered amp/mini PA system for players on the go

BY PETE MADSEN

I was once asked to perform a wedding gig on a beach with no access to an electrical outlet. I reluctantly sprung for a battery-powered amplifier, and sure was glad I did, because it totally saved me. After the gig, I lent the amp to a street musician and never saw it again—but that's another story.

If you're a busker, singer-songwriter, or other performing musician, you'll probably run into a situation where you wish you had a battery-powered amp. That's where a smart new amp from Fishman—the 60-watt, two-channel Loudbox Mini Charge—can help.

## AC AND DC

The new amp is essentially a rechargeable, battery-powered version of Fishman's very popular Loudbox Mini. I own a Mini, so I decided to compare the two amps. Their front panels are almost identical. The first

channel on each has a quarter-inch input jack, gain knob, phase button, three-band EQ, and two knobs for dialing in amounts of reverb and chorus. The second channel has an XLR input, gain, two bands of EQ, and a reverb dial.

The Charge adds a Bluetooth-pairing button that will tether your wireless playback device to the amp, with output level control coming from the Master volume. The simplicity of the Charge is great for a quick setup, but may have drawbacks for those who require more flexibility. For instance, the second channel, designed primarily for vocal use with its XLR input, has only low and high EQ adjustments. And the reverb and chorus effects sound decent, but are not adjustable beyond setting the ratio of wet to dry signal.

The rear panels of the two amps differ slightly in that the Charge deletes the regular

Mini's quarter-inch input, while keeping the 1/8-inch auxiliary input and an XLR DI output.

## FAMILIAR SOUNDS

Both Minis have Fishman's characteristic clarity and sparkle, but the Charge sounds a little warmer to my ear. The Charge offers plenty of volume for playing on a street corner or in a small club, and if you need more volume, you can always send the DI signal from the amp to a PA system. Fishman claims the amp will last up to four hours at full volume or 12 hours at normal volume on a single charge, which can take up to ten hours using the wall charger. I played through the Charge for a couple of hours and did not notice any deterioration in the sound.

At a modest 21 pounds, and in a compact size, the Charge offers a warm, clear sound for guitarists needing volume and portability. **AC**

## SPECS

**AMP** Two channels, 60 watts; 3-band EQ on channel 1 and 2-band EQ on channel 2; Inputs: 1/4" (ch. 1) and XLR on (ch. 2); Output: DI out

**SPEAKERS** 6.5" woofer and 1" soft dome tweeter

**OTHER** Bluetooth connectivity; phase control; 1/8" aux input; Effects (reverb and chorus); AC adapter; 12" x 13.7" x 9.7"; 21.2 lb.

**OPTIONS** 12-volt car charger; deluxe carry bag

**PRICE** \$499.95 (street)

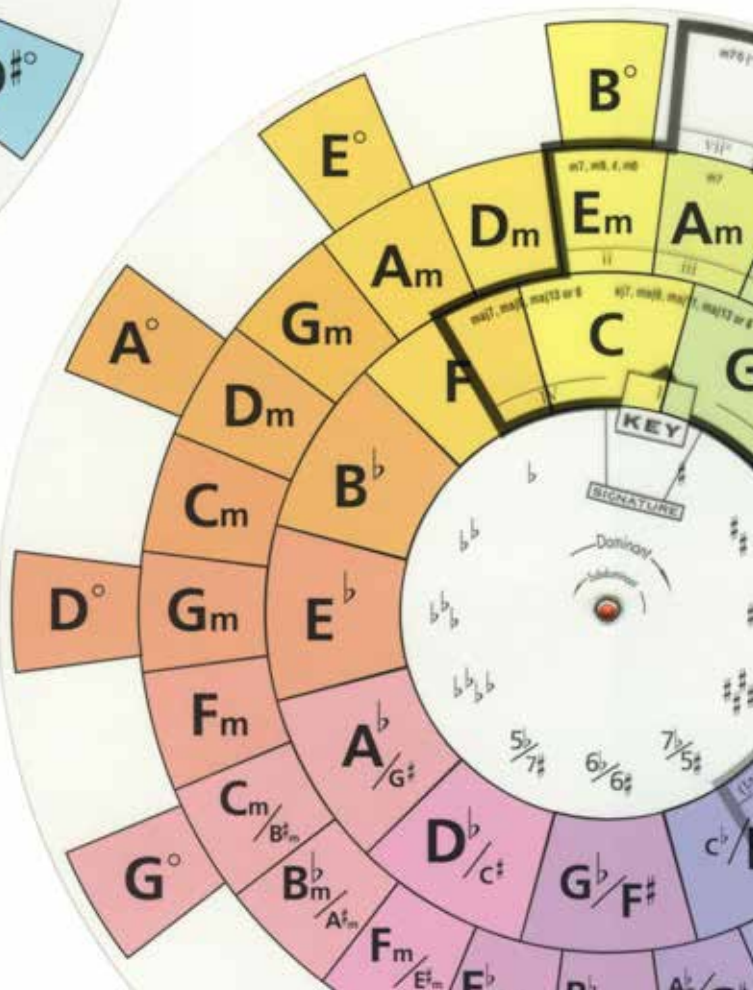
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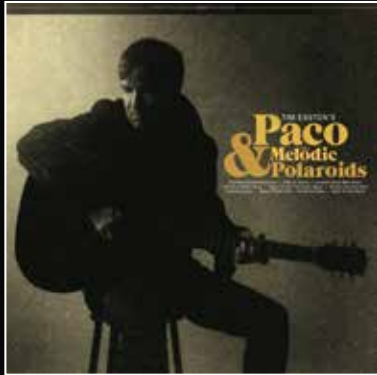


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**Tim Easton**  
*Paco & the Melodic Polaroids*  
(Campfire Propaganda)

PLAYLIST

## Have J-45, Will Travel

Tim Easton's folk-blues tunes are gritty and insightful

BY BLAIR JACKSON

The “Paco” in the title of Tim Easton’s latest folk-blues album is the nickname that was bestowed long ago on his trusty, travel-worn, black Gibson J-45, his constant companion over many years of traveling the globe—busking, playing clubs and any place that would have him, scraping by, while building a solid reputation as an incisive storytelling songwriter, an evocative singer (with enough sandpaper and rasp in his voice to match that guitar), and an outstanding fingerstyle player and flatpicker. In its notes, he describes the album as “a love letter of sorts to my guitar through a collection of wayward traveling songs old and new.”

Just as Gillian Welch and David Rawlings have mastered the art of writing contemporary songs that sound like ageless old-time country numbers, Easton manages to mine earlier folk and country blues styles as the primary inspiration for his songwriting. As a result, his

music has a familiar, even authentically “old” feel to it, but the sentiments and lessons are clearly autobiographical musings drawn from his own peripatetic, sometimes hardscrabble life, and from things he’s seen, and people he’s met, on his travels.

This is a true “solo” album: It’s just Easton’s voice and guitar—and the occasional shuffling, wheezing, or crying harmonica—on nine of his original tunes (plus a cover of Jimmie Rodgers’ “Jimmie’s Texas Blues”), recorded live with a single microphone, direct-to-lacquer, at a studio in Bristol, Virginia. If you saw last year’s superb *American Epic* documentary series about the birth of American roots music recording in the late 1920s, you’ll recall that the early sides by the Carter Family and others were recorded—also in Bristol—in much the same way: a method that fits Easton’s songs beautifully and lends the entire project a palpable intimacy and intensity.

You can get a sense of the vibe and themes on

the album from some of the titles: “Never Punch the Clock Again,” “Elmore James” (in which Easton laments that in today’s music “these drum machines all sound the same”), “Broken Hearted Man,” “Traveling Days,” “Another Good Man Down” (a cautionary tale about cocaine), and “California Bars” (his previous album had a song called “Alaskan Bars, Part 1”). And then there’s “Jesus Protect Me”—not quite a religious plea, it turns out, but “Protect me from your followers/Not all of them/Just the ones who turn love into fear and hatred.”

There’s plenty of variety to Easton’s deft guitar work—from understated slide, to fluid Doc Watson-style runs, to gritty blues and deceptively simple-sounding folk-picking. At just over half an hour, you’re in and out of this record pretty quickly, but it’s amazing how far Easton travels and how much emotional terrain he covers over the course of this remarkable musical journey.

AC

MICHAEL WEINTROB





## San Francisco String Trio

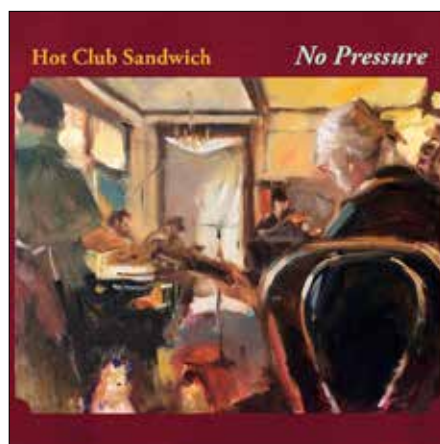
*May I Introduce to You*  
(RidgeWay Records)

### Sgt. Pepper's Gets a Cool, Jazzy Makeover

June 1, 2017 saw the deluxe 50th-anniversary reissue of the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. A few months later, the San Francisco String Trio released its debut CD, a tribute to the 1967 LP that revolutionized art-rock. Rather than attempt to recreate the Beatles' multitracked psychedelia, however, Mimi Fox (electric, acoustic, and 12-string guitars), Mads Tolling (violin), and Jeff Denson (double bass, vocals) approached *Sgt. Pepper's* as a set of vehicles for jazz improvisations, exploiting the quirky melodic genius and harmonic potential of the original's familiar tunes—11 by John Lennon and Paul McCartney, one by George Harrison. Whether you feel *Sgt. Pepper's* was the Beatles' greatest or most overrated achievement, this Bay Area-based trio's treatment offers fresh insights into the landmark album's musical anatomy, much the same way that fingerstyle guitarist Laurence Juber did with the songs on his latest Fab Four project, *LJ Can't Stop Playing the Beatles!*

The album opens with a Gypsy jazz-like swing through "When I'm Sixty-Four" and includes three lovely Denson vocals ("Fixing a Hole," "Getting Better," and "A Day in the Life"). Fox, Tolling, and Denson, who divided up arranging duties, give one another plenty of space for extemporaneous flights. Tolling's experience with Turtle Island Quartet is evident in his extended techniques; Denson's bowing and plucking move from deep harmonic underpinnings to intriguingly shaped solos; and Fox's clean articulation and beyond-mainstream-jazz guitar tone bring subtle flash to "Within You Without You," "Lovely Rita," "She's Leaving Home," and "Getting Better."

—Derk Richardson



## Hot Club Sandwich

*No Pressure*  
(Acoustic Oasis)

### Genre-jumping band swings hard on new set

*No Pressure*, Hot Club Sandwich's fifth album, was recorded live in a turn-of-the-20th-century (former) bordello. It sounds like it, and that's a compliment. The Washington state sextet's repertoire mixes Gypsy jazz with genres that enjoyed their heyday when the brothel's business boomed: folk, string-band jazz, and rustic waltzes. The group plays with a lively gusto that befits a house of ill repute, and leaves no room for stuffy reverence.

Producer David Grisman's mandolin graces half of the set's 14 songs, blending effortlessly into the band's insouciant swagger. On his composition "Swang Thang," Grisman's mandolin entwines with Matt Sircely's own in climbing chromatic harmonies that dovetail into guitarist Matt Connor's acoustic canter.

The band's fluid approach to interplay extends to genre as well. Propelled by the pirouetting harmonies of Sircely's tenor guitar and Tim Wetmiller's violin, "Melancholy April" is a pop tune crossed with Gypsy jazz. Wetmiller's see-saw fiddle and Connor's serpentine guitar sashay through the Peruvian waltz "Odiamé." Grisman and Sircely's twin mandolins trill while Connor's arpeggios tumble on "Winter Rain," a shimmering bossa nova.

The ebullient cover of Slim Gaillard's "Palm Springs Jump" is a string-band swing tune, dancing on—and obliterating—the border between Django Reinhardt and Bob Wills & His Texas Playboys. A mournful rendition of "St. James Infirmary" seems straightforward enough, but then dive-bombs into double-time New Orleans jazz, proving that when it comes to genre, Hot Club Sandwich just can't stand still—and that's a compliment too.

—Pat Moran



## The Gothenburg Combo

*Seascapes: 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*  
(Combo)

### Swedish duo goes deep on minimalist, sci-fi-inspired voyage

If Terry Riley's landmark composition *In C* comes to mind while you're listening to *Seascapes*, it should not be surprising. Swedish nylon-string guitarists David Hansson and Thomas Hansy, performing as the Gothenburg Combo, have recorded that masterwork and have appeared onstage with Riley. The music of Steve Reich is in their repertoire as well, and so is that of Bach, Debussy, Albéniz, Piazzolla, Abba, Gershwin, and Lennon & McCartney. Minimalism—long passages of repetitive interlocking patterns and nuanced harmonic shifts—plays prominently in these ten original compositions inspired by the Jules Verne science fiction adventure classic. But Hansson and Hansy disrupt the patterns with effects and extended techniques: simple single-note melodies, chiming harmonics, or silvery glissandos against pulsating pulled chords and arpeggios; plectrum scrapes and slides against the strings on one guitar to contrast with harp-like plucking on the other.

Such titles as "The Last Words of Captain Nemo," "A Lost Continent," "Kuroshio (The Black Current)," and "The Coral Realm" reference passages in the Jules Verne novel and episodes in the underwater voyage of the Nautilus. Guitar tones range from warm and spongy to bright and brittle, and the feel of the music veers from the oceanic vastness of clear blue depths to the claustrophobia of submarine compartments; from the languor of being "Lost in a Heavy Sleep" to the anxious jitters of being tossed and turned in a "Maelstrom" fathoms below the surface of the sea. All of which makes the Combo's sixth album an exhilarating experience.

—DR

# Leonardo Buendia Mod.D Cutaway

**A luxurious modern dreadnought, built from a fabled tonewood**

**BY ADAM PERLMUTTER**

A couple of years ago, guitar maker Leonardo Buendia was at the Santa Barbara Acoustic Instrument Celebration when he met a retired Southern California luthier who had a stash of rare wood sets from a fallen mahogany tree known for its intense figuring. (Search “The Tree” at [AcousticGuitar.com](http://AcousticGuitar.com).) “The luthier had bought the wood in the early 1980s [when it first became available on the market] and stored it carefully for all these years,” Buendia says. “I knew I would never find Tree wood as good as this, so I begged him not to sell it—to give me time and let me buy it.”

By the summer of 2017, he had saved enough money to unburden the retiree of his leftover Tree stash. In his Oakland, California, workshop Buendia recently put the wood to excellent use, as the back and sides of the dreadnought-size guitar with Manzer-style wedge pictured here. For the soundboard, he opted for Adirondack spruce of the highest grade, in terms of the consistency of its grain pattern and coloring. “I’ve never spent as much on spruce as I did on this unique example, but I wanted the very best woods I could find for the guitar,” Buendia says.

The luthier also spared no expense when it came to ornamentation. He went for an elaborately hand-carved wooden rosette—a technique he learned from his mentor, Ervin Somogyi—and extended this Celtic motif to a graft at the endpin. “I fell in love with the style when I first saw it, and I asked Ervin to teach me how to do it,” Buendia says. “It’s a very slow process. It takes about ten full working days just to make a single rosette like that, but the end result is amazing.” **AG**



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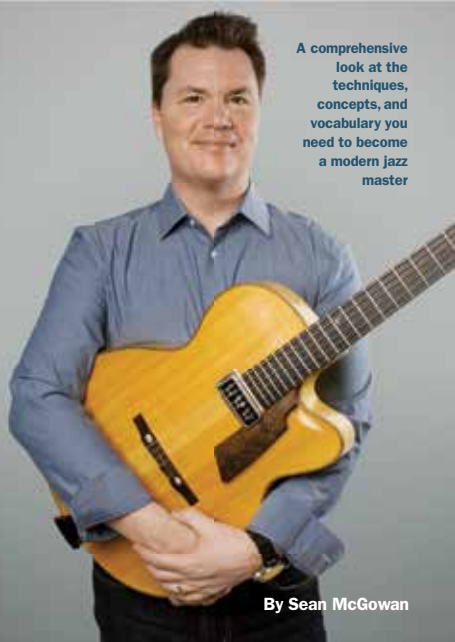
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